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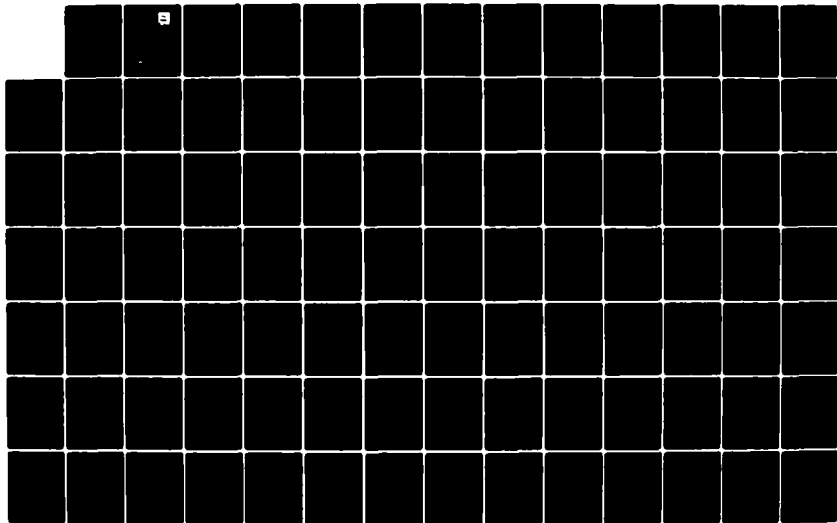
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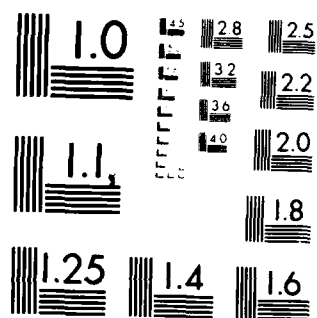
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### THE MILITARY AND THE MEDIA-- A NEED FOR CONTROL

BY

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM

THE MILITARY AND THE MEDIA--  
A NEED FOR CONTROL

GROUP STUDY PROJECT

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. BACKGROUND . . . . .	6
III. MEDIA CONTROLS . . . . .	10
IV. ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS . . . . .	20
V. CONCLUSION . . . . .	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	33
APPENDIX 1 PROTHEROE. . . . .	37
2 WILSON . . . . .	47
3 ESPER. . . . .	76
4 MIDDLETON. . . . .	90
5 RAMSBOTHAM . . . . .	109
6 JENNINGS . . . . .	135

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In January 1983, ABC's Nightline with Ted Koppel, addressed media control and the public. Much of the show was taped before a live audience at the University of Washington. A woman in the audience, obviously frustrated by her perception of sensationalism in news reporting and apparent insensitivity with regard to the viewers, gave a plea fraught with emotion, for the press to "clean up its own act" since it has overstepped its bounds in reporting. This comment was wildly applauded by the university audience, not because the substance of her comments were irrefutable, but because she struck a responsive chord in the people around her. This incident is cited since it reflects attitudes similar to those noted among mid-level military officers attending the US Army War College and throughout the Army. "In any future conflict, 'the overall attitude of senior Army officers toward the media would be extremely negative.'" So concluded a 1982 US Army War College study which surveyed 168 War College students and 120 active duty or retired general officers.<sup>1</sup> A second study, done a year later, reinforces these findings and says that the majority of officers do not trust the media to tell the truth.<sup>2</sup>

Drew Middleton, military correspondent for the New York Times reports that beyond the college "deep, abiding resentment in the officer corps against the manner in which, by and large, the (Vietnam) war was reported by the American print and electronic press."<sup>3</sup>



Lloyd Norman, for 32 years Pentagon correspondent of Newsweek magazine, observes that in a number of War College seminars he attended, "a growing resentment toward the 'free press' was present."<sup>4</sup>

This is not a twentieth century problem, nor a wartime problem alone. James Reston once observed, "The conflict between the men who make the news and the men who report the news is as old as time."<sup>5</sup> More specifically, "The instinctive secrecy of the military and the Civil Service; the ready connivance of the media at their own distortion . . . all these occur as much in normal peacetime . . . as in war."<sup>6</sup>

Middleton, not unreasonably, believes that this "them against us" sentiment is "likely to return as a full-blown problem for both sides should the country become involved in another limited war with indistinct rules for press coverage."<sup>7</sup>

That kind of contention would also be a problem for a society, Middleton adds, which "depends upon mutual respect among its principal institution."<sup>8</sup> Major General Jerry Curry, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, would agree. He reminds us that while circumstances "often place the government and the media in adversarial positions . . . this does not mean that they must be antagonists or enemies."<sup>9</sup> But the stated attitude: "I strongly believe the media cannot be trusted to accurately report what is happening, as found in Scott's study indicate an antagonistic relationship exists."<sup>10</sup>

This general mistrust grew out of the Vietnam War, where a commander was typically faced with working with a newsman who was under the control of far away editors and producers who "processed" his stories. There was no censorship to "protect" him. Mistrust was compounded by a myriad of journalistic habits, procedures and techniques that stood between the American public and the news. These barriers included the highly selective

"packaging" of news that decided what was fit for public consumption. Moreover, there were the Networks' ubiquitous deadlines and budgetary and manning considerations which created pressures to get something on the air and encouraged corner cutting.

Since the war the attitude of suspicion and distrust of the media has been further set in the minds of the military. The public and media plaudits given in the past few years for investigative reporting have sharpened the conviction that the media is out to get the government. If the conditions outlined above persist and US national policy dictates that she again fight a limited war, the potential exists for the results of the Tet '68 reporting--victory into defeat--national policy changed--to be experienced again. One can speculate on the consequences if national survival were at stake. At best, the options available to the wielders of national power would be severely curtailed if uninformed or incomplete reporting led to a great cry of "No more Vietnams" from the editorial pages of our country's newspapers every time a sabre is rattled.

The compelling questions that come to mind when considering this problem are: What should government policy be toward the media in time of crisis? How will the media react to news control in the interests of "national security?" Are there controls or conditions that the media would accept as reasonable? Is there an ethical level beyond which the media would not go in reporting news that might give solace to an adversary? Is there a middle ground between censorship and full First Amendment rights? Who would set and enforce standards of conduct? What do other nations and their military do and does it work?

To answer these questions, this study sought to interview military and media personnel and to focus on the Falklands Crisis as a case study wherein censorship was applied under modern conditions.

To this end, Brigadier General Bussey of the Army Public Affairs Office, George Wilson, Washington Post, Barbara Cohen, Vice President for News, National Public Radio, George Esper, Special Correspondent, Associated Press, Robert Siegenthaler, Vice President for Special Events, ABC, Drew Middleton, New York Times, Charles Anson, First Secretary, British Embassy, Washington, DC, and in London: Colin Jennings, Ministry of Defence. Brigadier D. J. Ramsbotham, Director Public Relations--Army, David Cohen, Press Attachee, US Embassy, Major Alan Hooper, Royal Marines, Alan Protheroe, Deputy Director General, BBC. David Nicholas, Director, Independent Television Network, and Peter Jennings, ABC were interviewed to ascertain their views, to determine the adverse effects of the restriction of the public's need to be informed and to find out from them what would be palatable or non-palatable forms of constraint in time of crisis or war.

Not all of the interviews were taped, not all of the tapes were of sufficient quality to allow reproduction. Those that were are included as appendices to the main study. The values of contemporary leaders in media make interesting reading.

As pure research, this study probably fails miserably. The authors were sometimes less than expert in their questioning techniques and when we found ourselves being plied with scotch, usually bad, we had some. What happened was that through a series of informal dialogues we came to hear and know men and women of stature in their fields. All in all, they were honorable men, working for institutions that had pride and responsibility. The quality of answers, the depth of concern expressed affected the authors' opinions. It is their opinions, largely, that you see here in this study, not a series of quotes. We have done the synthesis, and come to a working conclusion that we feel will be of value to the Army.

The first portion of this study is an attempt at looking at the potential for media control during crisis or war.

An attempt to look at the potential for media control during crisis or war. After an initial historical perspective, it attempts to capture the predominant institutional attitudes extant, albeit in anecdotal form. This effort is important in order to fully gather the flavor of the military's demands for significant control of the media. The argument for censorship is addressed and emphasis is given to the higher order dysfunctions such censorship could cause. In the end, a recommended change to existing media policy is proposed that serves as the conclusion to this project.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND

Almost twenty years ago, a British military writer observed that ". . . there can be few professions more ready to misunderstand each other than journalists and soldiers."<sup>11</sup> Ever since William Howard Russell first accompanied British forces into the Crimea, an uneasy relationship, at best a marriage of convenience, has existed with neither side quite certain where they stand. His observations of inefficiencies, tragedy and disaster and his criticisms of the Army's leaders prompted the Secretary of War to hope that the troops would be moved to "lynch that man from The Times."

From that time on, acrimony seems to have tempered this relationship. For example, Sherman banished the press from his camps during the Civil War and Patton demonstrated his sensitivity to them during his first press conference after breaking out in Normandy: "Before starting the inquisition, I wish to reiterate that I am not quotable and if you want to get me sent home, quote me, Goddammit."<sup>12</sup> Sir Winston Churchill once remarked privately to Lord Reith that, ". . . the BBC is the enemy within the gate." General William C. Westmoreland has stated if that situation were to be repeated, censorship would have been imposed on the press in Vietnam.

On the media side, the statement that "Burnside has yet again managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory," has been attributed to a somewhat cynical member of the Washington press corps during the Civil War. George Wilson, military correspondent for the Washington Post, observed that the military all too often hides its embarrassments under the cloak of security.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, another noted journalist, Robert Elegant feels

that the press in Vietnam evidenced an attitude that if the Administration affirmed a controversial fact, that fact, if not prima facie false, was at least suspect.<sup>14</sup>

In a more modern context, the media who testified before the House of Commons Defense Committee Review of news handling during the Falklands conflict uniformly felt very strongly that they had been used and abused. They believed the government attempted to use them for disinformation, that they had been lied to, and important facts had been obfuscated; the military, particularly the Royal Navy, tried everything in their power to deny them access to the war.<sup>15</sup>

These complaints have their almost exact parallel in the statements made by the media representatives we interviewed about their personal experiences in Vietnam. All of these charges and counter-charges combine to support the somewhat cynical characterization of Peter Braestrup that news reporting in a modern war is "an Orwellian grope."

One can go on and on outlining the complaints and grievances of both sides. But it suffices to say that the feelings run deep. It would seem that an inherent conflict exists between the military and the media. Both sides have their just arguments. To illustrate this, consider the fact that, although everyone knows that the press almost destroyed Patton over their reporting of his soldier slapping incident and other lapses, stop to think further that the reason Patton is a folk hero today it largely due to the publicity his military genius received from those same members of the press.<sup>16</sup>

In any event, when a nation is at war and men's lives are at stake, there should be no ambiguity as to roles or relationships.<sup>17</sup> The conditions and circumstances that exist between these two institutions have no rational room in war or crisis. But they do exist and unless checked, will

continue to do so. One can only speculate on the impact if they do. The perpetuation of this situation can only bode ill for the nation and the people who serve her.

If you render all of the rhetoric down to the basic parts, you begin to have a military attitude toward the media that seems to be, "We'll fight the war, friend, and after it's over, we'll tell you who won so you can print it." This attitude is further compounded by many senior officers with an over-sensitivity to news that they don't consider "positive." The ensuing cry, "My God, can't you control what those people write," is a common one to *Public Affairs Officers* everywhere. It's a fact that more military careers have been lost than made by what appears in the papers.

Again, dealing in simplistic over-generalizations, we have a media who espouses a certain arrogance, "... it's your job to hide it and our job to dig it out." "We are the Media. pay me now or pay me later," and they also evidence a certain thin skin towards any criticism of their trade, methods, responsibilities and possible influence on the flow of world events.

Of course, these two over-simplifications do gross injustice to the vast majority of professional members that form the ranks of both institutions. What is being portrayed, albeit in broadest terms, is a flawed portrait of the perceptions of one another that seem prevalent. In short, we have a military who doesn't like the media, a lot; and a media, somewhat above all that, who are more than a little disdainful of the military.

In the end, this produces a rather interesting situation. Both institutions succumb to the notion that the other should be closely watched and kept on a very short tether. But this view denies the logic for their existence. Their roles and purposes are simple and clearly self-evident.

For example, the unfettered existence of the media is absolutely vital to our national fabric. Equally vital to the national fabric is the existence of the military services, poised and ready to do the bidding of the country. Moreover, it is imperative that the nation be free to exercise the elements of power in the pursuit of her just and legal objectives. The determination as to what form that exercise should take: economic, political or military, should not be decided in the media or in the streets or, for that matter, necessarily in secret. The military must also exist as a free, unfettered and non-affiliated element of national power. The military leadership must be free to give what counsel and advice their unique point of view mandates. The media should serve to inform the public of that view.

In peacetime, the media can act as a watchdog for the taxpayers and keep an eye on the military, while, simultaneously, keeping an eye on the government for the apolitical military. But more importantly, they will act as a link between the military and the people of the nation, keeping them in touch with each other and ensuring that the people have a realistic view of the nation's defense posture and assuring that we have an army of the people and not just an army of the government.

In war, these same linkages must continue to exist. But the most important thing that happens in war or crisis is the part the media plays in the generation of the enigma called "national will." National will has many definitions, but one that serves well is the "soul of the nation." Without it you are lost. It is reflected in the attitudes and opinions of the varied and disparate American peoples. Many would advocate that the nation's media directly influences national will. It is difficult to refute or prove this. It is probably safer, and smarter, to say the press serves to place on the agenda what the public thinks about, and this, to a large degree helps influence the course of national will.



## CHAPTER III

### MEDIA CONTROLS

On the surface, these last remarks would hardly seem controversial. But to large numbers of influential military men, to consider not imposing strict controls on the media in time of war or conflict to assure "positive, supportive" national will, is to forfeit the match. For example, most of the officers polled in the Army War College media studies of 1982 and 1983 indicated that only the imposition of strict censorship would make the presence of the press acceptable in time of war or crisis. More specifically, the significant majority felt that the freedoms allowed the media during Vietnam could not be repeated if we were to successfully prosecute a war whose dimensions were anything less than a popular crusade or one where national survival was not obviously at stake. Censorship! . . . Strong words, and a little scary to the media and to those who concern themselves with the guarantees of the First Amendment.

Wartime censorship is not new to the United States although it has not been imposed since the Korean conflict. It is believed to be mechanically "do able," but it is not considered an active possibility for any future conflicts.<sup>18</sup>

The Espionage Act of 1915, which is still on the books, and the Sedition and Trading with the Enemy Acts, which have been repealed, formed the basis for censorship in World War I. They made punishable acts that were considered disloyal, would aid the enemy or would adversely influence enlistments or the draft. In general however, censorship during the First

World War was voluntary and enforcement efforts were concentrated "after the fact" rather than trying to exert control through prior restraint.

During World War II censorship was instituted and was balanced with an aggressive program that publicized the war effort (albeit mostly the positive aspects). News at home was voluntarily censored, but news from the front--those areas under martial law--was subjected to a rigorous screening in the classic sense with scissored copy and the censor's blue pencil.<sup>19</sup>

It is this period of military-media history that gives the contemporary military officer a warm feeling deep down inside: everything had to undergo the scrutiny of the censor and field commanders felt free to discuss information in depth with the press without fear of disclosure. Drew Middleton, military correspondent for the New York Times, observed this phenomena and believed the absence of censorship hurt the quality of reporting to later come out of the Vietnam era. As the senior officers there felt more and more on dangerous ground, the more they denied direct access to the press<sup>20</sup> and relegated their inquiries to the Public Affairs professionals who were often uninformed, at best at a distance from the full picture and certainly not representing authority with the same air of responsibility a general officer would have done. In World War II however, the media felt close to the senior leaders and as a result of this, a mutual trust was built up. Many were privy to closely held secrets without fear of premature disclosure. This circumstance gave the press a greater perspective as to what was going on and a greater sense of purpose, plus they felt part of the effort . . . they owned stock in the company. For the most part, they responded responsibly when treated with responsibility. Better reporting had to result. Now, if only those days could be recreated. . . .

But wait a minute, is this the crux of the problem? Is it the fact that censorship was not instituted in Vietnam that forms the basis for the magnitude of the military's ill feeling toward the media? The implications of this supposition are that with no censorship, the enemy must have gained something from what was in the press that gave him an advantage--tipping the scales in his favor, or, that public opinion was so inflamed by what the media said or showed that it caused them to turn against what was otherwise a just cause. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that with censorship things would have been different.

Well, that argument is too bald to fool too many for very long. But something did happen . . . there is still too deep a sense of disenfranchisement on the part of contemporary military officers for it to be ignored and it is germane to the discussion of controlling the media during wartime because it contributes to understanding why the demand for control is so persistent and pervasive.

But is censorship the answer? To hear it told in the bar of the officers' club or to listen to the tone and temper of the questions thrown at representatives of the media speaking at senior service schools, it certainly is! "The press wasn't the Fourth Estate, they were more of a Fifth Column. They lost the war for us in Vietnam. Those bastards . . . wouldn't trust 'em as far as I could throw 'em!" And thereupon follows the apocryphal litany of a melange of manufactured and staged images, glorifications of the macabre and grotesque, exaggerations and distortions of fact and outright lies originated from the safety of the Caravelle Hotel all laid at the feet of the ubiquitous media. And there were those absolute examples of abomination as an art form: "How do you feel about the war, soldier, now that you've lost a leg, eye, best friend," and all of those

things that are part of the memory of those who were there, part of the institutional lore of that era.

The media immediately counters with their view of the mendacities to which they were subjected: the death of a thousand bites; no big lies, just lots of little ones; the Five O'Clock Follies; the policies of a command that pronounced a pilot, who was wounded by gunfire over Hanoi, a non-combat death because his plane doesn't finally crash until it is outside the official war zone boundary; the idiocy of the ever changing rules of engagement--sort of a "who's on first and can I kill him?" routine; the body count fetish that was so blatantly inflated; the light in the end of the tunnel that turned out to be a train; and the rise of the class of military mandarins, managers with all their bland, featureless corporate-ness, which, in the absence of a clear cut policy to win the war, combined to give the media the right to answer back, "Hey fella, we didn't lose the war, you just didn't win it. And we just reported what we saw."

True or untrue? Henry Kissinger says, "The dilemma is that almost any statement about Vietnam is likely to be true; unfortunately, truth does not guarantee relevance."

What is relevant to this discussion is that there was no censorship in Vietnam and yet less than a handful of reporters lost their accreditation because they violated the voluntary ground rules that protected security, troop movements and operations in progress. If the media did not violate security aspects under the aegis of voluntary censorship, then, of what are they guilty? Is the real issue the frequency of what was reported? The types of questions asked? The subjects covered? The tone and color of the news? The implied editorial stance of the content? Was it this and not the truth of what was being said that is the source of the offence in Vietnam about which the military feels so strongly?

If this is so, the potential future imposition of censorship during war or crisis takes on a complexion of a different hue. For one thing, little support would be forthcoming from the media for outside control of such subjective matter. All of the journalists we interviewed expressed immediate alarm and presented a united front against censorship of this nature. Generally, all agreed (albeit some more grudgingly than others), that some protection must be afforded operations in progress, and lives should not be put at risk, nor should the enemy be given an advantage by what is disclosed in the press, and the privacy of individuals should have a reasonable amount of protection. All of this was viewed as acceptable and the normal role of a responsible press. But censorship on the basis of maintaining public morale, or for political reasons, or in terms of taste, color or tone or the repression of facts already in the public domain was just unacceptable.<sup>21</sup>

For one thing, who are the minders to be and what are their motives? Are they more pure than the press? Who watches the watchers? Most would agree that it is difficult to discover who would be qualified to determine whether a particular piece of information would have a specific impact on public morale. Alan Protheroe, Deputy Director-General, BBC, observed that telling the cold truth about Blitz damage, civilian and military casualties, losses of ships, planes and materiel did not have the effect of lowering British public morale during World War II. The actual effect was quite the opposite.<sup>22</sup> To set up a government agency for this purpose would need staffers with Solomon-like attributes.

Other subjective areas are just as difficult to assess. One thing about which the British press was consistent was their views as to the inconsistency of the government censors during the Falklands campaign. Some censors were interested solely in security matters, but other's scope

included areas more appropriately titled "taste and tone." For example, one deemed it offensive and a potential black mark against the quality of the RAF for TV film to have been shown of a pilot, just returned from successfully shooting down an Argentinian fighter, to remark that for ". . . a moment ne had been scared fartless."<sup>23</sup> Protheroe feels such determinations belong more properly to the editors. He continues by cautioning the military to stay inside their areas of expertise when he says that ". . . censorship for any reason other than operational matters just isn't the military's job."<sup>24</sup>

Censorship for political reasons is probably the reason for the protections in the First Amendment. The old saying about more evil has been accomplished in the name of good is applicable in this sense. Braestrup exonerates the actions of the press to a certain extent, in his book about Vietnam War news reporting, when he charges that they became disenchanted when the US government went from simply telling the truth to exhortation and expected the press to join in as cheerleaders.<sup>25</sup>

There is a grave danger, when done for political reasons, that the misapplication of censorship can destroy, first, the credibility of a nation's press and second, that of the nation herself, viz., Argentina's self-effacing propaganda blasts early in the Falklands War destroyed any credibility she might have had for those events that later were reported or commented on honestly.

But let's look for a moment at more rational arguments for and against total media control. The issue boils down to fundamental principles--the public's need to be informed and the government's duty to withhold information for the operational security. Unfortunately, current history is replete with examples where the broadest interpretations possible of operational security have been exercised and "for security reasons" has become a

catch-all justification for not releasing inconvenient or embarrassing news. When this happens, no one is served and the concept of operational security is devalued and the media's (and subsequently the public's) confidence in the government suffers.<sup>26</sup> If however, in the absence of controls and in the zeal to get in print, something is published that the layman's eye failed to detect as sensitive, then the government's entirely understandable reaction will likely be even more restrictive in the future release of even non-sensitive material just to cover all its bases.

The poles of the issue include the argument made by some that any attempt at all to impose controls over the media in time of war or crisis is at direct cross purposes with the public's "right to know." At the opposite end is the argument that mandates total control regardless as to circumstance. What must be found is the balance point wherein an acceptable information policy can be developed that does not cater to excesses on either side of the pale.

The following lengthy extract from the summary of conclusions of the House of Commons review of the media and information handling during the Falklands conflict gives a very insightful and moderated view of this issue:

It is very easy to argue that to suppress the truth is alien to a democratic society, but even this argument can be given an exaggerated emphasis. In particular, it must be remembered that the Government's credibility may appear quite different in the eyes of the media and the public at large. The two are clearly related since public opinion is influenced by media reporting and commentary, but they are not always equal quantities. Many principles, supposedly regarded as sacred and absolute within the media, are applied in a less rigid and categorical way by the public as a whole when it is judging its Government's conduct of a war. In our judgement the public is, in general, quite ready to tolerate being misled, thereby contributing to the success of the campaign. Never the less, if taken very far, this approach, too, can involve dangers. Apart

from discrediting of government spokesmen if information release policy is seen as overselective, it is vital that no government seeks, in its urgent need to prosecute a war successfully, to insult itself from the process of democratic accountability. We are confident that, in practice, any democratic government will recognize that, if it misleads the public so comprehensively that it becomes impossible to question the wisdom of continuing with a campaign (especially if this is followed by a major failure), then it will have to suffer the political consequences. This, after all, was amply illustrated--even in non-democratic Argentina--by the fate of General Galtieri and his colleagues in the junta.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, an observation has been made that has applicability at this point and pertains equally to those in the military who deplore any mention of unfettered war reportage and those in the media who claim that the public "need to know" is absolute and government deceit will result if the public are not told everything. In our interviews, the media told us over and over again that fears of potentially adverse impacts by the press, especially television, on national will were grossly over-advertised. We were warned that we should never underestimate the maturity of the American people nor should they be considered so foolish as to be taken in by the relatively limited access the media gives to complex issues. "Everyone knows that war has many sides . . .," etc.<sup>28</sup> Acceptance of this call for respect for the maturity of the public constituency has an attractive cogency for both parties--the military and the media--because it means that if that position is accepted as given, then the military could be less concerned about public over-reaction to what they read and see. Once that was established, it would allow for the existence of a more relaxed and open relationship with the media. On the obverse, the media would not need be nearly so hysterical in their views on the imposition of controls during crisis or war, because it could assume that a mature public can accept and



live with those controls as being an essential part of life and an acceptable way for governments to act in time of war.

In any event, the simplistic solutions suggested by the Philistines just won't wash. Censorship in its full blown state is an anathema to too many clear thinking men. It is only as you begin to explore the labyrinth of complexities associated with censorship that the full magnitude of this subject becomes clear. The larger issues of public right to know, government need to control and subjective subject matter have already been explored. Three additional arguments are presented to close out the discussion.

David Nichols, Director, Independent Television Network, London. Peter Jennings, noted correspondent, and Robert Siegenthaler, Vice President for Special Events, both of ABC, were quite convincing when they described the technical advances that are just over the horizon for electronic news gathering equipment. In their view, it will be very difficult to control newsmen who have hand-held equipment capable of transmitting from remote locations via satellite direct to the home office, thousands of miles away.<sup>29</sup>

Next, American society is not geared to accept the lack of timeliness and paucity of news that censorship of the type witnessed in the Falklands would bring. We are too spoiled by a decade of moon shots, attempted assassinations, and papal visits, all taking place in our living rooms, to accept news that seems to have been warped in from an earlier time dimension.

Last, censorship may be just too dangerous to impose. This thought has a certain ludicrous ring to it until one considers that brinksmanship is a recurring theme in crisis and heightened international tension. It is essential in a confrontation that the players understand clearly what each other are saying. It is difficult enough for the statesmen to deal with

the faceless monolith that is the Soviet national visage, but we are used to that. However, when an ordinarily open nation shuts its windows, it could have a catastrophic effect. This is so especially if one nation sadly misconstrues another's resolve because censorship had destroyed credibility. In one way, this happened in the Falklands. In the eyes of Argentina and many other nations, the absence of any international press with the Task Force reduced all statements emanating from 10 Downing Street to that of self-serving propaganda. The Argentinians deluded themselves into believing they were seeing a great bluff and, as a result, were prepared to call. Unfortunately for them, Maggie had Aces over tens.

## CHAPTER IV

### ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS

The answer then, contrary to what many of our colleagues would have us believe, is not censorship. At least not in the classic sense. That being so, retention of the status quo is not the answer either. What is needed is a new middle ground on which to form a revised wartime military information and media policy that will come closer to satisfying the needs of the disparate parts. A new information policy is necessary to provide the impetus for change in what is obviously an unsatisfactory situation. The old policies contribute to mistrust and do not reflect the major changes in journalism techniques and attitudes in the last few years and must be adapted to present attitudes and capabilities. But for any information policy to approach that middle ground, several constants would have to be present.

Initially, the policy must be based on mutual trust and responsibility between the military and the media. To do so invites willing cooperation. To do otherwise invites confrontation, circumvention and finally ineffectiveness leading to repeal, voiding any benefits that might accrue.

But inside that velvet glove of trust and responsibility there must be a steel fist. Those things that need to be protected must still be inviolate. Lives and victory must not be hazarded and so that honesty is rewarded, there must be punishments for the dishonest. The rules of the policy must be decided on and produced up front, no surprises. (This is contrary to the British Falklands experience of using a Band Aid approach to produce plans that dealt separately with each succeeding crisis until,

finally, the cry of "foul" was heard from the media when the rules of the game sank in at last.) Finally, the information plan must have sufficient flexibility built into it to be realistic in the face of change.

This philosophical beginning provides a framework on which to hang some of the details necessary to more fully consider the efficacy of creating a new information and media policy. Drew Middleton is correct when he reminisces about World War II and says a better military-media relationship will exist when there is censorship.<sup>30</sup> We want to capitalize on that but we want to avoid the capriciousness and stifling effects that are a part of fullfledged censorship. Fortunately, censorship is unlike pregnancy; it is possible to have a little censorship--pregnancy just is.

Presented next is the essence of an information policy that has been made a little pregnant by providing a modicum of control over the media to protect those things that need protecting and, at the same time, guarantees significant freedoms. This policy is not intended to be an end all-be all and is revolutionary in only one or two aspects. It serves, simply, as a point of discussion and a convenient vehicle to capture the main conclusions that this study has developed. As you will see, many of the thornier issues are merely held up to the light to prove their existence. Some are ignored as being too obvious and some have been ignored out of ignorance or oversight.

To begin with, it is envisaged that in the future, during a period of crisis, rising tension or declared war, the revised media policy would allow competent authority to impose censorship. That imposed censorship would be strictly limited to the military aspects of the situation and would adhere to the following four prohibitions:

1. No information would be disclosed that would jeopardize planned operations or operations in progress.

2. No information would be disclosed that would increase the risk to loss of life.

3. No information would be disclosed that would give an advantage to the enemy.

4. Reasonable protection would be afforded the rights of individual privacy.

(Whoa! Before you decide what this means, read on. The intent of all of this is to create a middle course, not entertain the lunatic fringe of either side. If your personal stress indicator is already pegged in the red zone, too much is being read into the problem. The definitions, limitations, permutations and combinations that are associated with the exact and perceived meanings of these four prohibitions defy the space available here and would be the subject of much subjective emotionalism. That is why the next provision of the revised information plan envisions the creation of a panel to deal with this issue.)

An integral part of the new media plan is the creation of a special body to act as an agent in dealing with the creation of the components of the plan, and once finalized, in its implementation and operation. The name of this panel would be the Media Policy Board and it has its counterpart with the Press Council in England. This is a new wrinkle in modern times in the United States, but similar organizations existed in World War I as the Committee on Public Information, albeit the functions were somewhat different than is foreseen here.

The President would appoint the Media Policy Board. It would be a bipartisan blue ribbon panel comprised of highly placed representatives--serving or emeritus--of the nation's media, plus with military presence of flag rank. They would be drawn so as to fairly represent all media by

type--electronic or print--size/circulation and regional affiliation. The objective is to nominate a group that represents all of the media disciplines and possesses a broad editorial bias.

Their first duty would be to come to grips with the issue of definitions. They would be chartered to arrive at the specific meanings and applications of the four rules of engagement. Their determinations would be presented as a book of guidelines that would serve as the body of precedent to be used in application of field censorship. Next, they must determine just who is the competent authority who would be empowered to impose censorship. The alternatives could include the President, Congress, Cabinet Officer or the President with some form of Congressional interaction, viz. as seen in the War Powers Act wherein the president has certain options, but he must advise the Congress in 72 hours. Furthermore, they would have to consider whether or not any geographical or temporal limits would be implicit in the exercising of that authority. All of this would be packaged and forwarded as a recommendation to the President for approval. The next step would be to initiate a request for that legislation necessary for inclusion of the approved plan, e.g., as a provision of the War Powers Act.

On completion of this not inconsequential task, a couple of options are open for the peacetime employment of the Media Policy Board. One is for the principals to meet from time-to-time to keep the machinery oiled, to receive high level briefings and to act as a kitchen-cabinet sounding board for the President, since they do represent a significant, and elite cross-section of American media. Or, the board could go into stand-by status awaiting activation in time of crisis or heightened tension. In either event, a small permanent secretariat would of need be established to

maintain a continued presence and perform the day-to-day administration work endemic to any beauracracy.

Once the board was activated or when the time had come for censorship to be imposed, the Media Policy Board would act as a clearing house for policy and serve as a court of last resorts, an ombudsmand for both sides-- the military and the media. For example, if a reporter in the field feels his copy is receiving unfair treatment or censorship is being used for the wrong reasons, his editor has an ear on the Policy Board; if the military feels that a certain news agency is being unfair in its temper and color, the Policy Board is the conduit for the complaint. The board would not be a censor per se. It serves as an overwatch and practices committee, and in Lippman's terms, shines the light on the item in question.

The board would watch the consistency of field censors and be alert for any attempts by either side to take unfair advantage of its position. The Media Policy Board would have no punitive powers. All they are empowered to do is to offer statements of censure or approbation. And, being who they are, they would have access to the media to publish their findings. This is not as toothless as it sounds, and almost exactly matches the operation of the ombudsman found on many large newspapers, with much the same subtle effectiveness that they have.

Moreover, both parties are aware that this new media plan is a marriage of trust and cooperation; violation of its precepts would result in reversion to status quo anti pace. For those who feel that this is not enough, particularly insofar as establishing a hold on what is viewed as the irresponsible press is concerned, most newsmen we talked to were quite sensitive to any aspersions cast on their credibility or attacks on their representations on truth, balance and fairness. Many military men feel that the press lacks a working code of ethics. The Media Policy Board,

being of the media, is being asked, in a sense, to police itself. This is a positive first step in the development of a working code of Good Practice. The beginnings of a professional code of ethics. Although there is no guarantee that the presence of a Media Policy Board will prevent major wrongs from being committed, it is the seed of a positive program of dialogue which heretofore has been characterized by shrill charges and counter-charges hurled on deaf ears.

The Media Policy Board would also be tasked with establishing the guidelines for accreditation. An accredited newsman would have full cooperation of the military in-theater, plus transportation, escort, NBC protective gear, etc., and above all, access to the sources of the news. One who is not accredited would not necessarily be exempted from attending briefings, they just wouldn't be told when they are.

There are two sometimes opposing thrusts to be considered in the determination of an accreditation policy. First, there is a desire on the part of the government to ensure that the deserving and responsible are rewarded and that no vipers are brought to the bosom. At the same time, there is the need to ensure that the view is balanced. However, a great deal of anguish from the Vietnam era stemmed from the excesses committed by the free lancers, much like modern Palladins, riding in search of a cause. They brought no reputation with them and no credibility was at stake; nothing to lose, establishing a reputation at the expense of the truth.

It seems that a reasonable policy might be that those, on whom accreditation would be bestowed, must be responsible newsmen, working for established organizations with a discernable need for access. This would not exclude a reporter from Rolling Stone, but it would not favor inclusion of the military correspondent for Burpee's Seed Catalogue.



In the main, accreditation is not designed to be a tool to limit access by newsmen, but it could very well be used that way. The thrust, in this case, is to define the pool of eligibles and to maximize the opportunities afforded by the limited resources at the source of the news. Final determination of accreditation of particular newsmen should rest with the Department of Defense.

The next area of concern in the formulation of a new media policy are the field techniques for vetting the news copy.

The Falklands campaign found that two levels of censors were needed. One at the source and the second back in England. This latter agency was charged with the overwatch role and for "big picture" items that the local censors might not be aware of. This step may not be necessary if the Public Affairs-field censorship activity efforts are linked together, particularly if a senior Public Affairs officer has sole theater control of the censorship effort rather than relegating the function to lower unit responsibility, so that the public affairs aspects of the ongoing situation are clearly understood at all levels.

That which seems to hold most promise for the future follows the Israeli model closely. Each news team is escorted by an officer who is charged with acting as their liaison. It is his duty to gain access, intercede on their behalf and ascertain what can and cannot be reported, thereby short circuiting many censorship problems. It is help rather than hinder that is the name of the game. Plus, he helps get their copy vetted through the censors. This officer is not to be considered a "keeper," he is more correctly an "assistor." Whether or not sufficient officers would be available to perform this duty is a moot point, but duty could very properly be performed by Reserve Component Officers or Mobilization Designees activated for that purpose.

The escort officer may seem like an extravagance that can not be afforded in time of war. However, the Israelis understand the importance of the media and they, along with the British, have decided the return is definitely worth the cost.

Censorship of all news copy would be conducted by teams convenient to the front. Copy being telephoned back to the editors or put on the satellite could be censored on-line by monitoring the call back, as it went, excising any offensive copy in a real-time fashion. This necessitates a decentralized censorship effort with a certain amount of autonomy. Since purely subjective matter is not considered for censorship, this task is greatly simplified, but a great deal of judgement and experience is needed.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ernie Pyle never made it to Vietnam. He died somewhere along the way. There is reason to believe he's going to stay that way, after all, Willie and Joe are gone too. What must be seen is that what is taking place now is a different breed of cat on both sides, it has different needs and will react differently, than the military or the media of yester year.

To complicate this change, powerful forces are at work--human rights, individual freedoms, national survival and ideals. Simple answers just won't work. The camps are divided and the battle lines have been drawn for a long siege. Therefore, it is necessary to re-draw a line more close to the middle.

This study says that controls of the media should exist in time of conflict, crisis or war. But that is not a carte blanche for unmitigated censorship. Those controls should be aimed at purely military/operational security matters, not be an excuse for the King to run around naked. To add a safeguard that assures excesses are not allowed on either side, a watchdog panel of media experts should be formed to act as an Ombudsman for both sides--to protect and to serve.

As a minimum, these two aspects will provide a quantum improvement over the self-defeating system that existed in the last conflict this country faced.

#### ADDENDUM

The last area to be discussed is a matter of great concern to the authors and not necessarily part of the charter of the formal study. Our study has confirmed the existence of a serious negative attitude toward the media in contemporary military officers. That attitude runs deeper than the words here aptly describe. If this attitude is allowed to continue, serious consequences could result, not the least of which is the alienation of the public from the military. Correction of that attitude cannot be accomplished solely through a revised media plan. Adjustment can only come through education and training and both sides need the training.

The British had much the same situation when they started in Northern Ireland 14 years ago and they were pilloried in the press. Recognizing this, they started an aggressive program to educate first, the senior officers, then officers of all ranks, on the methods of the media. This was predicated on the understanding and initial acceptances of the adversary role. Later, they attacked the adversary nature of the relationship and aimed to eliminate it by educating the Army on the role of the media and its place in the national fabric. Their programs were very effective and the press were uniform in their admiration for the way the Army dealt with them during the Falklands.

We would do well to emulate that experience. But it must start at the top and trickle down.

Along with education should come a formal training program. Familiarity breeds belonging. More journalists need to be exposed to the Army. NBC, parachute, altitude chamber, ejection seat, mountain climbing are all

skills that could be offered to potential combat journalists to prepare them for the rigors of war reporting and its Army should offer them for the taking. Journalism students should be offered 3 week internships as reporters on posts or installations to fulfill course credits at their colleges and at the same time expose them to military reporting and the military. Rather than having reporters along to report exercises, such as REFORGER, as exercises, reporters should cover the action and report the outcomes, the stories as news. Their copy would be vetted based on the rules that would exist in war. Instead of the exercise being a media event, it would be an exercise for the information plans that would be in effect--from the wear of NBC clothing by newsmen to the operation of censoring. In any event, it is the view of this study team that the situation that now exists is capable of being reversed and must be reversed. But the situation possesses a great deal of urgency.

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INTERVIEW  
WITH  
ALAN PROTHEROE  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL, BBC,  
LONDON, 11 APRIL 1983

Protheroe:

Falklands is a unique experience. Now, remember, everybody in this country was on a very slow learning curve as far as the Falklands was concerned. The media were. We hadn't reported a war in which we were involved since 1946. And, you can't really take up things like Cyprus, Aden, brush fire peacekeeping operations and Northern Ireland obviously is an example.

What I've been trying to do during the past year is to translate the Falklands experience to the European Theatre, and I find that none of the lessons of the Falklands can be applied to Europe. You see--let me go back very quickly. The problem of the Falklands was this: the government information service, which is a machine that is practiced at home to meet an eventuality like this, was not used. The military and the political civil servants wanted to fight a private war and they came very badly unstuck about it. One branch of the civil service is used to operating sub rosa. It operates quietly, it operates behind government--it is government in many ways. It is the only continuing thing. When governments change the civil service goes on. So they operate sub rosa. You also had the information service who are chartered to go out and tell the world what the government is doing. You have, on the one side of the civil service, people who are playing very quietly and, on the other side, people whose task it is to disclose. Once you have got to the point where the political

civil servants are trying to handle the public information side, then you are in deep trouble. I don't know whether you've seen the evidence that's been submitted to the House of Commons Defence Committee. You'll find some startling examples of misunderstanding, and mismanagement on an unprecedented scale.

These are two different relationships: between the media and the military on the one hand, and the political civil servants and the politicians on the other. So, you've got to separate those entirely. The other obvious thing to say is that Vietnam should really be forgotten. I don't think CBS finished the war in Vietnam.

Interviewer:

We, personally, don't blame the media for losing the war for us. We know that there was an absence of strategy at the beginning and that the media's differences were with the policy and not with us. You've said, never again will there be access like was given in Southeast Asia.

Protheroe:

I don't believe that will ever happen again. I lecture at the Psychological Operations Course in the NATO staff courses and this is a point I make all the time. I think it showed the great strength of a united democracy. I think amazing courage was shown by the society. Certain crazy things went on. One could write his Senator or could write the President and say, please send this kid from Winnelka High School magazine to Vietnam for a fortnight and he would go. He'd be transported, fed, watered and looked after, and everything else. Well, and kid who comes back may have a very small effect. But, cumulatively across the United States you had a tidal wave. I think you also had a nation which was fundamentally divided about the involvement in Vietnam anyway. I think you had a military discipline problem there which was highlighted, and which

intruded because it was exposed, and which contributed to the general failure of perception of understanding in the nation. I'm talking about films, of the air cavalry regiments smoking "pot." That doesn't seem to me to be a problem for CBS or the American nation. It seems to me, like a good old-fashioned battalion commander not putting his hooks into people. I can understand the dismay. Cumulatively the picture was that the media shafted the military, and I can quite understand the residual anger that exists. I think that is fatal and I think that if the military does not remain, and is seen to be, apolitical then I think the military has lost before it starts.

Interviewer:

The Falklands provides us with a springboard. There are some mechanics, and we can look at the mechanics as examples: the minders business, the satellite business, the accreditation.

Protheroe:

If there is an involvement in Europe, it is going to be the biggest story in the history of the world because of the potential disaster. Now, there is no way that anybody can prevent a huge number of journalists from moving into Europe in the NATO countries. You can't control entry. You can't control transportation because journalists will have the Mercedes and they will get fuel and food and everything else because they will have the money. There is no way, unless somebody is going to say, with every crew and every journalist we're going to put a minder. I've done some routine checks with various people. ABC news will deploy from London alone in the transition to war 100 people. That's ABC news alone, and ABC news of course would be re-inforced. These people are going to be moving in there. People are going to be shuttling back and forth. They're going to be speaking a half dozen languages. I'm going to get there as many as I

possibly can. I'm going to have correspondents in as many capitals as I can, and I'm going to have correspondents in teams moving around. When you get to the first stage of mobilization which will occur very quickly, I suspect I'm going to move more people in there. So is NBC. So is ABC. So is CBS, and so it will be with Scandinavia etc. Nobody is sophisticated enough to prevent Polish, Soviet Bulgarian, Romanian journalists coming into Germany which is going to be the key area. They'll be there. Censorship in Germany is constitutionally illegal. I asked the Chief of Staff of Northern Army Group, "Can you imagine a situation where a German government will take emergency powers and decrease censorship?" He said, "Categorically, no." Now, the government will apply pressure on broadcasters, newspapers and everyone else but the fact still remains that all this stuff is going to be photographed and reported for radio, it's going to be written up in newspapers, and it is going to be produced for the airwaves. I don't see any way in the world you are going to persuade those journalists not to cover something. Let me give you this example. The cheapest shortwave radio set has a range of reception which can actually pick up all kinds of stations. This country will be bombarded by the Russians alone with 16 frequencies everyone of which is broadcast in English and called the North American Service or the World Service. They put out a magnificent signal. The Russian News Service is almost identical. The style is the same as the BBC World Service, exactly the same. I wake at three o'clock in the morning and turn on the radio set and I remark "Yes, that's the World Service." Then I ask, "Has somebody gone mad down there." I'm ready to pick up the phone, and I realize, "No that's the Moscow World Service." What I'm saying quite simply is that that is a kind of information, and there is going to be cleverly concealed propaganda pouring out. The idea that the British public is only going to be watching BBC or ITV and is

going to be listening only to the British and read British publications is absolute nonsense. That censorship which actually prevents us from broadcasting something which somebody else has already disclosed is a blow to the credibility of BBC. The national effort will be undermined, and that's the danger with ill-considered censorship. Credibility is a cumulative thing. You are believed today because you were right yesterday and the day before that. The whole reason the BBC is so creditable is because it demonstrably tells the truth consistently. I cannot see what censorship system can be applied in the field first of all I think it's absolutely impossible. There is no way that you'll have people going back to Koln or Dusseldorf or any given point and saying "Look, would you sit down for a moment?" "We want to play this tape through." There will be too many tapes. There will be ground satellite stations out there the size of a 1 ton van. Reporters will be able to send their stories right back to the States. If those reporters are American citizens operating under the 1st Amendment there is no way they're going to have the British government say, "Don't do that fellows." At BBC, we start off by saying quite clearly it is our job as a journalistic organization to disclose. That's our function. That's what we are required to do. Second, we believe that the public's right to know is inalienable. But we say we will accept censorship if what we are about to disclose hazards life or hazards the success of an operation. You must explain to us in what way the operation will be hazarded. The reason it worked in the Falklands before our forces went ashore was because they were called in for briefings and they were told, "OK, now look guys." "Don't for God's sake report this, because if you do it will give away..." And simply because journalists were told, "Don't say that," they never even attempted to say that. Now, conversely in London, you had people attempting to censor materiel for taste. When you're talking about



censorship, you have to be absolutely clear what you mean. There are crazy examples. The censoring of the description of the HMS Intrepid was one of the all time classics. The Navy censor down there said we mustn't call it the HMS Intrepid and we asked why and he said we would be describing the ship. If you turn to page 232 of Jane's, Fighting Ships, it tells you more than you'll ever need to know about the HMS Intrepid. The assumption must have been that the Argentines had not had a copy of Jane's, Fighting Ships. Now if you have a military that is perceived as having that kind of an attitude, that kind of nonsensical approach, then you are destroying the relationship that must exist between the military and the media. Censorship must be of a very high caliber, and it has to be very clear as to why you are censoring anything at all.

Interviewer:

If you'd have had a camera crew aboard the Sheffield, there would have been a hell of a temptation. These would have been some really dramatic stuff. The immediate impact of the men with shock in their eyes, in tatters, and flesh hanging off of them. Coupled with the shock of the Sheffield being sunk, it might have had a synergistic effect that is incalculable.

Protheroe:

I think taste is a responsibility of the broadcasters, not the government organization. Such a censorship of material for it's effect on civilian and military morale is not the business of the military. How can you decide how can I decide what will damage or enhance the national will. During World War II, many of our cities were flattened and captial ships sunk, and all this was reported. Rather than damage national will, it enhanced national will.

Interviewer:

There's some among you and some among us that I can't trust. How do I distinguish them?

Protheroe:

You can't, except in hindsight. That's the awful truth. There are far too many.

Interviewer:

One of the lesser forms of censorship is an ad hoc editorial grouping. You participated in one. Was it useful?

Protheroe:

Yes it was. Censorship does not work, because it actually can't be applied. I think the mechanics of applying censorship are so complex it's not worth the effort. You have got to, at a time of national crisis, have some kind of system where the responsible media, responsible government, responsible military actually meet and resolve the difficulties that they have. If the government says, "Here is the line we want you to take," the media will quite simply say, "This is a democracy, and you do not dictate the line." The military would be foolish in the extreme to use their relationship with the media. It happened for a very short period in 1970. They contrived to combine information and psyopa. It was disastrous and they nearly managed to destroy their credibility. We advised them not to go on doing it . . . in Northern Ireland. The public wants to know what is going on, but in time of crisis it will actually not read the Morning Star, the Communist newspaper. Somehow there has got to be . . . a climate where those editors who actually look at the copy, look at the film, listen to a radio recording will say, "OK let's get some advice on this." You create that climate by having a combination of regular briefings, and a standing group of government, military and media where you disclose a damn sight more

than you would disclose in public. You've got to take your courage in hand and say, "Look this is what we're trying to do." Not in detail, but it must not be misinformation or disinformation. It has got to explain why something has to be done, and why it should not be disclosed. When you have created that climate, you are beginning to come close to solving the problem. The Army, because it's been involved in so many different places, has long since adopted a policy of telling, if it's possible, and telling the truth. Tell it as quickly as you can, and if you don't know say you don't know. The military must accept that it is not a continuing and hostile relationship between the military and the media. It can't be. The moment you get the military and the media together, there's a form of mutual support that develops and has developed. It's not the military or the media that decide to go to war. That's a political decision. That's a government decision. Now the first task of the government is to convince the nation that it's necessary to go to war. It does that by supplying it's arguments. The government has to tell it's arguments in such a way as to overwhelm the opposition. The media has got to give voice to the counter arguments. The one mistake governments make all over the world is to underestimate the understanding of the public. The fact remains that the public is capable of understanding very difficult and abstract concepts-- like the concept of territorial integrity which is why we went to the Falklands. Provided the argument is made strongly and the argument is properly reported.

Interviewer:

You said Britian lost the information war and was shunted off on to the siding by the Mandarins. How do you mean that?

Protheroe:

I think to go to war even in a limited way is a profound gesture. Once you assemble a task force and that task force sets sail, then that is the moment when the government has to convince, not only its own electorate, but also the western world of the rightness of it's cause. We had a situation where not one foreign correspondent accompanied that task force. I think that was utterly and absolutely wrong. I think the reason we lost the information war was our lack of preparedness. In British soccer when you pass the ball back to the goal keeper and it goes into the goal a goal is scored for the other side. That's how we lost the information war. We scored too many "own" goals. . . .

(Quoting From A News Article):

During the Falklands crisis, the credibility and stature of the BBC was maintained. The evidence comes from witnesses in South America: "If Argentinians really want to know what is going on in the Malvinas, they have to listen to the radio station of neighboring Uruguay for reports of BBC." The materiel was used because it was accurate and the truth, and because we said things like, "The government today said that . . . the Navy said today that. . . ." Yes I accept that there has to be some kind of limit on the amount of information that comes out when you're in an armed conflict. Supposing during that transition to war, you apply censorship for what seems to be very good reasons: strategic tactical military, for taste, to maintain the national will. You find that your national broadcasters are not saying things that other people are saying. Then you don't go to war at the very last minute. Al Haig comes down in his chariot of fire, and solves it all. What are you left with in this country? You're

left with a complete destruction of credibility, not only of the broadcasters but also of the government, of the military, and of all the institutions that support democracy. I honestly believe, not being overly dramatic about it, that's what's at stake. That's why I think you have to look at censorship, and back off and say, "Let's not have it--there's too much at stake." And then say, "On the other hand, there are these very small areas." Define those absolutely precisely--you could only do it by consultation. Create that climate where journalists like myself say "Hold it." "Before we put that on the air what are the implications of it?" and I think you might well find that premature disclosure of the loss of the Sheffield would be a situation where they might say, "Yes, not only are there military reasons, but it is better. . . ."

End Of Interview

INTERVIEW  
WITH  
MR. GEORGE WILSON  
MILITARY CORRESPONDENT, WASHINGTON POST  
WASHINGTON, DC, 11 February 1983

Wilson:

I start from the premise that there has to be more engagement between the military and the media, now. If we wait until there is war, even a half-pregnant war, we're in worse trouble than ever. I think we need to look through both ends of our telescopes. I am worried about your problem from the standpoint of, what I like to think is, a professional journalist. We have people coming up as editors in our paper who have never been around the military, who have never been in the military, and are suspicious of the military, just as the military are suspicious of the press. This kind of mutual suspicion, without the two ever engaging, is not healthy. I think there is a desperate need now to try to narrow this gap. People who decide what's news, people who write the news and the military who are subjects of the news are trying to deal with this phenomena. We need more mutual relationships between the media and the military. From my end of the telescope, I feel very uncomfortable about the fact that we have young people coming up, and editors, who have never been around the military, and nobody in the military has been around news people. Journalists by nature are curious or else they shouldn't be in the business. They want to get a front-row seat on what's going on.

Interview:

Do you feel the same as Peter Braestrup who wrote the Big Story?

Wilson:

No. I had trouble with that book. I was in Vietnam with Peter for awhile. He has a case to make, but it wasn't quite that universal. I thought there was a lot of good reporting in Vietnam. The story got out that it wasn't the way to fight the war, the national leadership decided that this was a loser, and we ought to cut our losses. In my reporting tours there, I would sit down with guys and ask, "How is it?," "What's good?," "What can you do and what can't you do?" They would say, "Look, I've got open borders all around me, and all I am doing is buying time for the guys to negotiate a peace." "I'm losing kids every day and there is just no way I can win it." Now, I told that story. It became so credible that we weren't doing it the right way, that we would have to change or get out. So I am not so ashamed of that chapter in media reporting. I admit that it was the first televised war and the shock value of that is something that I cannot cope with. You can make three bombers blowing up a refinery in the Iranian-Iraq war look like World War II. But, that's a different subject. Basically, I don't agree with Pete that we all overstated what was going on.

Interviewer:

He really, though, focused on Tet. Tet was kind of an anomaly.

Wilson:

Yeah, but think where we had come from. Just before Tet, Bob Komer and all those guys doing the "hearts and minds" had said the country is pacified. You can say that Tet was a military disaster from a strictly military point of view. . . .

Interviewer:

Tet truly was a disaster for the North. Think what would have happened if the media really reported that in absolute terms. People would

have been buoyed up I think, but what they really felt was shock and dismay. There's Walter over there saying, "My God, the end is near." I don't feel it was irresponsible. I just felt it was so big that it was uncovered in that sense.

Wilson:

The fact is, that Tet was '68 and we're still there in '72. If on the one hand, the chief objective was to pacify the countryside. . . . That is what you were allegedly there to do. That's the way it was sold to the people: "We're just going to pacify the countryside, then we're going to get out and leave it to these Vietnamese who we've been training and equipping." If Komer says two weeks before Tet that things are never better, and then, during Tet, they are in the embassy grounds, you can't look at it just strictly from the military point of view. That's point one. Point two is that the military command wasn't all of one voice either. True, Westmoreland said, "Now they've shot their wad and lost." But there were mixed reviews among the military on what this meant at the time. And, regardless of how it was reported, the military stayed in Vietnam and casualties continued high after Tet. So, even if you say that Tet was portrayed the wrong way by the media, it didn't really lead to a pullout.

Interviewer:

There is a perception that the media, literally without control, was able to turn something into something it was not.

Wilson:

The perception goes back to medieval times. It's much easier to shoot the messenger than it is to accept the bad news. My view is that the messengers were saying that Vietnam was a half-pregnant war. The military, to this day, can't really explain what they were doing over there. Any



number of Congressional hearings, which had nothing to do with the media, were focused on trying to answer all those questions. What the hell is the bombing strategy? What the hell is the ground strategy? How will we know when we're there? What is our objective? When do we sue for peace? Johnson would line up the Joint Chiefs and say, "Yeah, they all agree we need more men." Westmoreland stood before the full Congress in joint session and politicized the whole war.

Interviewer:

President Johnson, before he left the presidency, said that if he had to do it over again he would have censored the press because he said that was the biggest obstacle he had.

Wilson:

It's always easier to shoot the messenger. But the fact is that unemployment is 10.4%, and we didn't do it, goddamn it. We lost 55,000 guys in Vietnam. I didn't shoot one of them.

Interviewer:

Don't you think that, if we went into El Salvador, the reporting would be the same that we had in Vietnam? Don't you think that there would be a need for something different?

Wilson:

I go back to complete censorship of the press during World War I. We lost thousands and thousands of kids everyday in trench warfare 10 yards, 10 yards, 10 yards. It was an indefensible strategy. The people never learned about it. All they got were the casualty lists. I'm not sure that we'd want to go back to that where a handful of old generals can keep putting young people in trenches with no accountability. I think you have to have accountability. After all, officers are hired hands of the taxpayer and the people should be able to know what is going on.

Interviewer:

Let me give you a parallel to think about. Mel Zeiss and Korea. That was a "World War I" kind of action where the troops were fed in against a dug-in enemy. They were chewed up at a rate that they had not been chewed up before. The nature of the war had been a sort of hit-and-run. As soon as the infantry hit they pulled back. He was pilloried for this by Tuesday morning quarterbacking because American boys were being killed in a useless attack, not to seize ground and hold it but just to kill the enemy. Isn't that what you are saying? Or is it that World War I won't happen again under current conditions because we guys would see that and we'd challenge the leadership: "What you are doing is an attrition strategy at the expense of the youth."

Wilson:

Somebody would challenge it. What happened with Mel Zeiss was that he followed orders like a good soldier. When the casualty figures kept coming in, Senator Kennedy, among others, got up and deplored this strategy. Although it was personalized with one poor old battalion commander, I think that that challenge was representative of a larger challenge: "What are we doing here?" In that sense, I think, it raised an important question. It would have been a convincing rebuttal that Johnson or Westmoreland or the Joint Chiefs or anybody could have given. I think the Kennedy's of this world could have been silenced. So the press, in effect, was saying, "This is what Kennedy said about it and this is what Westmoreland said about it," and it became a matter of national debate. I think that you've got to have some kind of a convincing argument. If you are going to ask a country, with a tradition of freedom, to send their sons, you must give them causes they understand. If you could have explained the war, the people

would have gone along. That's what the Commander-in-Chief is supposed to do.

Interviewer:

I never had any trouble accepting that killing them was what we were after, because killing them did a lot of other things.

Wilson:

But, nobody at the top had the nerve to say that this was a war of attrition, that we were going to bleed them white. Nobody explained it that way. Let's face it. All over Vietnam when I went over, there was talk about taking the night away from the Vietcong. The battalion commander doesn't want to take those kids out and lose a hundred of 'em. You've got to have a strategy that you can explain and stick to. One day you say that it's a war of attrition; the next day you say it's pacification; the day before . . . It was a confusing war on the ground, back here, in the Senate, in the House. I don't blame the soldier on the ground, but I don't blame the media either. It's easier to blame the media, but we didn't lose the war in Vietnam.

Interviewer:

But you did help on the cutting room floor.

Wilson:

We made the strategy politically untenable. That's what we did. I'm not sure that was a good idea.

Interviewer:

I'm not so sure reporters are able to affect our national will, but you certainly do affect what we think about by just what you lay out on the page everyday, or put on the TV every night.

Wilson:

Oh yeah, that's true. We set the agenda of discussion. It's a judgment call.

Interviewer:

Some people espouse the idea that we should love and trust you and that you have really the truth at heart. When it is of concern we can trust a reporter on the ground to make the correct judgements. Is that right?

Wilson:

No. I don't expect Casper Weinberger to trust and love me. I hope he respects me because I call it straight. Whenever I go some place I haven't been before, the public information officer is asked by his general, "Is Wilson for the military or is he against it?" He can't accept the fact that I really am there to find out what the situation is, report it as straight as I can determine, and then go on to something else. The old-boy network that works in the officer corps, they think, should extend to the press. With some reporters it does. Some reporters, especially if they are from a small town in the South where the military bases are big, are one of the boys, and they'll say, "It's true that those instructors killed that kid, but that happens, and we're not going to make a big thing of it." So, no, I don't expect you to love me, but I would hope that, because I told it straight, you would respect me. I think that anybody who is a reporter and expects that he is going to be regarded as a candidate for the most popular man is not doing his job.

Interviewer:

Can we trust you to police yourself?

Wilson:

That's the heart of the matter.

Interviewer:

You're an old hand. Drew Middleton is an old hand. There are some people who say we can depend on you. That's one of the alternatives on the continuum--that we just trust you and it will all average out.

Wilson:

If we had an all-civilian board that could control censorship you wouldn't like it, and if we had an all-military board that was in charge of censorship, we wouldn't like it. So I think we have to find a way to bridge the gap. I think that step 1 is to work for a closer interface now. And how do you do this? I think the place to start might be the War Colleges. I've always wondered why the War Colleges don't have a Media Chair. They could have a reporter who could give a course in the media--military reporting, and what we do. They'd rotate guys who are respected and specialized in military reporting, and at the end of a six-week course both sides will have learned a little more. That would have to be just one of the modest things--some kind of interchange at the War Colleges. In the El Salvador situation, I don't know how you could work that out because most of the people who are doing that, let's face it, are doing it covertly. What's the sense of having a censorship board if you are not supposed to tell us anything. That's a twilight zone. First thing the State Department did when that Green Beret trooper was wounded in his helicopter was to say he was in-transit. They lied. I happened to be at the briefing. They lied.

Interviewer:

I have seen it happen so many times. Here we are in all our ignorance out there, and we get this panicky call from the boss who says that we have to have an answer right now, and the facts aren't in yet. They don't

care--"Get some facts." You've seen that go on in the Pentagon. If they actually had the facts and lied, that is reprehensible.

Wilson:

They sure as hell could have said, "We think he was going from point A to point B." "There was no combat involved, but we haven't got all the information in." I'll accept that. But to stand up there and say there was no combat involvement; he was just in-transit. And I asked "Was he armed?" "Well, we don't know, but he has the right to be armed." I've been lied to all over this town, by top officials.

Interviewer:

Braestrup didn't think that most of those top officials really lied "big" lies. They lied "little" lies.

Wilson:

They lied the big lies, too. Secretary McNamara said the USS Liberty was there to send messages from the embassy to the moon and down to earth again.

Interviewer:

It may have been in our national interest to say that in that particular case.

Wilson:

Then you have to take the consequences.

Interview:

Is it O.K. to lie in the national interest?

Wilson:

No, not in a democracy. I think it's better to say, "I can't get into that."

Interviewer:

That's a lie in a way.

Wilson:

No, it isn't.

Interviewer:

I would say, "I'm not at liberty . . ." and not answer you.

Wilson:

There are lots of things they can't get into. "How do you know that Iran and Iraq each have 100,000 guys. "They are at each other right now? . . ." "Well, I can't get into the means of intelligence collection." I understand that. I know how they do it.

Interviewer:

That's a little different though than the other. You know and I know that they have some means. It may be trained carrier pigeon, or a guy inside. But if you ask them the specific question, "Was that ship just sunk by the Israeli missile-carrying boat spying on the Israelis?" The answer is "no," or the answer is "yes," or the answer is "I can't get into it" which also means "yes."

Wilson:

Not necessarily. I think that's a better answer than lying, and being told you're lying.

Interviewer:

That's the way I would want to do it, tell you in such a way that you can't use it. I would say, "I won't lie to you, but there are some things we can't talk about, and that is one of them."

Wilson:

That's an option.

Interviewer:

If you get an answer like that, would you use it?

Wilson:

I would stop it right there. If I had been McNamara, I would have handled it by saying, "This is as much as we can tell you at this time: the Liberty's whereabouts and the casualties." When the Pueblo was captured, you see, they reversed themselves. They said exactly what it was doing, and I thought it came out a lot better. I think it's a bad idea to lie to the people which is, in effect, what you're doing.

Interviewer:

Do you think there ought to be different rules for the journalists who labor in the print media as opposed to the reporters who labor in TV?

Wilson:

Yes, I do. But I've got a bias there, of course. To some extent, they are. When Weinberger has a background briefing in his dining room, the TV reporters are allowed to sit around the table but they are not allowed to bring their cameras. You can't very well have a background briefing, where you are not allowed to name the guy talking, and then have a camera. I would like to see a lot more creativity on both sides rather than this kind of clenched fist between the media and the military. You have pretty vast networks of information officers in the services so you have the horses to do it, but you don't have any commitment at the top to try to do it. It's much easier to keep your head in a trench. Then you don't get shot at. It's kind of the General Vessey view now. It's kind of General Barker's view now. General Vessey said to his top associates, "If you've got any friends in the press, forget them." "If it hadn't been for them, a perfectly fine officer, General Singlaub, would still be on active duty." When you have that attitude at the top it's pretty hard for any officers down below to do much differently. I never blame the guy in the middle. I know he can go only so far as his general lets him. My plea would



be, let's start educating the captains and the lieutenants and the majors and the lieutenant colonels now, so that when they get to be generals, they are not going to love us but at least they'll understand us. If nothing else, it's "know thy enemy." I see very little understanding of what we do and why.

Interviewer:

On the flip side of the coin, if we were to develop a program which would help editors to get a better handle on the larger picture being reported, would that obviate our wish to try and get people in there who already had a reputation and are not looking to make one?

Wilson:

Do you mean, we won't give you a visa for Vietnam because we don't think you know what you are doing?

Interviewer:

Do you think the educated editor would eliminate the need to approach it that way?

Wilson:

It would help. I think that the first thing you'd have to do is to decide we don't have to love each other but we have to understand each other. That's point A. When we can understand each other then we'll be coming up with much more sensible solutions. If you agree we need more engagement, that's an easy one.

I think the solution to problem one is to get the top of both parties together. In other words, if Shy Meyer as Army Chief of Staff called Ben Bradley, Executive Editor of the Washington Post, to say, "We think we've got a mutual problem, and we'd like you to come over and talk to a few of us at the Pentagon over lunch and we're just going to lay on you what our problems are," Bradley would come, and Meyer would be forced to confront

the issue. He'd be forced to listen to what Bradley said in response. Bradley would be forced to recognize that he's got a bunch of kids who don't even know one end of a gun from another. We have to somehow get the top of this pyramid engaged.

Interviewer:

Why don't they do that?

Wilson:

We're safer to ignore.

Interviewer:

I don't see that the relationship we are discussing here is really any different than the relationship that the media has with State or with the White House.

Wilson:

I was out to Ohio State University on Tuesday and I sat on a panel, How to Avoid Nuclear War. The moderator was the editor of the Columbus Dispatch, a local paper. He said, "I've got to get a 7 o'clock plane because the White House has a cattle call." So, he flew to Washington and Reagan gave his side of the story to a different voice than the regulars in the White House. So there is a concerted effort by agencies other than the military to engage themselves with as wide a spectrum of opinion-makers as they can get. Now, I know it's tougher for you guys: separation of Church and State, separation of civilian and military. I think that you have to start thinking that way and get the top engaged. It does no good to burn a bunch of lieutenant colonels and colonels. You've just got to get the top command sold on your point of view or how can it go anywhere? And, I'm not talking about a big propaganda campaign.

Interviewer:

In essence, though, you are talking about a "kitchen cabinet," in a way.

Wilson:

Uh-huh. Somebody very articulate like Shy Meyer, should say, "Hey look, this is our problem." "We don't want to end up with another Vietnam where we are writing books forever more: 'you guys lost the war; we lost the war.'" "What the hell can we do?"

Interviewer:

If we went to war in Europe, you could be a famous guy because you are a senior correspondent. We don't have any plans to make you famous.

Wilson:

You're more worried about what we are going to do if the balloon goes up, and how you are going to manage the press in another war. My contention is that you have the problem right now, and there's a need right now to explain yourself. Like it or not, the military is competing for a limited amount of resources and the resources are getting more limited as each year goes on, as witness all the demands that the Pentagon budget be cut \$15M-\$30M, etc. If you just hang back from that and refuse to explain yourself because you can't trust the press, you are going to lose out. Or at least you won't have a chance to put your best argument forward. I think that's regrettable from both sides. I think the American people do damn well when they have the facts. We can't make up your side of the story.

Interviewer:

From '78 to '79, there was a study done on the content of network TV news from the military point of view. They monitored every minute of airtime. There was a minute and 18 seconds devoted by CBS on the evening news to the Soviet arms buildup vis-a-vis our relative inactivity during

the Carter Administration. I hear you saying that that's our fault and it's because we didn't get the issues forward. I can't believe that. Surely, somebody went down and said, "Hey guys. . . ."

Wilson:

If you measure the column inches that I wrote last year and the year before on the military it would compete with anybody else in the paper. I am not ready to accept the fact that the media has undercovered the activities of the military. My main thrust is that you need a better engagement, especially at the top. So that you know what we're doing and we know what you're doing. That doesn't mean that you're going to get all puff stories. But I think that understanding your problem is the first step to solving it. As of the moment, the problem we are talking about isn't even on the top ten topics of the agenda, I suspect, of the JCS.

Interviewer:

This year national will, media relations and morality issues are three items which are very important to the students.

Wilson:

Name me one four-star general in the last 10 years who has made a serious statement on the need to improve relationships with the media. I can't think of any.

Interviewer:

That doesn't take away from what I am saying because we are not four-star generals; we are an indicator of where the Army is going.

Wilson:

I'm not disputing that. I'm saying there's a lot of concern about the disease, but I don't see anything on the agenda to effect a cure at the top. They talk about the disease, and how terrible it is, how it affects the national will, and how there are not enough favorable stories. But

General Jones went all around the country talking about the need to reorganize the Joint Chiefs, and Bernie Rogers is going all around the country talking about a different NATO policy. I'm not saying they have to have an emergency meeting of the Joint Chiefs, but I don't see any recognition that we ought to regroup on this issue and think it through as thoughtfully as we have some of these other issues. If it's important, why isn't it important at the top?

Interviewer:

Is this a new phenomenon we're talking about--this distrust between the media and government institutions--or was there a time when it was better?

Wilson:

That's a good question. I don't think it's as bad now as it was when I was growing up. Before World War II, my sisters weren't allowed to date soldiers from Ft. Dix. There really was a separation between the military and the civilians, but that's a social phenomenon. But now, what the military does and what the policymakers do are so interrelated you can't have a "From Here to Eternity" kind of a set-up where the Army is behind a big wire fence and all reporters, wives, and mothers keep out. I don't think that the military has come to grips with the modern-day reality nor has the media. We've always been a quick-fix nation: go win World War I and then come home. Get me out of this Army uniform and I'll go back to doing what I was doing. A standing Army of 2.1 million people making living wages is unnatural for us, is new for us. There are related problems of having to be so public all the time, in effect, asking for raises, asking for money for aircraft carriers, and continually being in the spotlight as opposed to the old way. The only time you thought about the military was during the war when you drafted people. In between. . . .

Whoever knew about the Fort Polk's in the old days? I think you have been dragged into the spotlight unwillingly just as the US was dragged into a leadership role unwillingly after World War II. It wasn't very natural for this country to have to be a world leader. So you're part and parcel of it and, yet, you are not very comfortable with it because of the traditions. I think that the distrust was more in the old days, but you didn't have to worry about it because you didn't see us and we didn't see you.

Interviewer:

We hear about these reporters, and you may be one of them we hear about, who has his cronies--the guys he was in World War II with--in a high-level part of the staff, who sit down in the office, and puts his feet on the desk.

Wilson:

Yeah--I'm highly dependent on a certain number. You are not going to get some Marine to say, with the PIO sitting there, that the reason that Israel is pushing so hard against us is to discredit the multinational force. He just isn't gonna say it. There are a certain number of guys I could call on the telephone and they'll tell it to me straight because they know I'm not gonna burn'em. I need those guys.

Interviewer:

You're a known entity. When it comes to pick those who fill the slots, is accreditation by selection a reasonable process or not?

Wilson:

We do it now. Who goes on Weinberger's plane? Not everyone wants to. Looking at it from your point of view, I would rather say, "Look, we have a joint committee and we decided that the fairest thing was to do this." "We chose ten guys with the Wires each having one, and the five top circulating press . . . this is the fairest way we could come up with it because we

could only accommodate, given transportation, 25 reporters." "The Joint Military--Media Committee came up with this proposal, and I know you are not going to like it but. . . ." You gotta have that engagement. If you do it by yourself, you are just going to tick off everybody. In other words, let us take the heat too.

Interviewer:

Have you talked to any of the correspondents from Great Britain on the Falklands crisis?

Wilson:

No I talked to my National Editor who was in London at the time. He wrote a big OpEd piece about whether it's fair game to lie to the press. I would highly resent being lied to, while I was bouncing on the Atlantic, just to help deceive. . . . That's not what I'm there for. Either tell me straight, or don't tell me nothing. But, don't lie to me.

Interviewer:

There was a differentiation made between allowing you to speculate, and actually feeding you false information in the hopes that you would print it.

Wilson:

Which they did. I have a basic feel that what you should do is what comes naturally to you. You shouldn't try and make a guy something he is not. I think one of the best things about the military officer is that it's not natural for him to lie. He's trained to tell it straight. That's part of his code, part of his ethic. That's one reason I like being with the military. I'm much more lied to by civilians than I am by the military because they are not very good at it, it's not natural to them. I would hate to see them be trained to do that. I think you would lose much more than you would ever gain. I would much rather go to a colonel in the field

and say, "What's the story?" I would believe him over a civilian PIO who is a specialist. You know, I just want to know the truth. I don't want you to dress it up. I don't need it dressed up.

Interviewer:

Let's suppose that the bomb that was in the hold of one of the ships that the Brits had down there didn't go off. Great intelligence value; also, good news value. That's a good story: a young guy down there with a bomb ticking away and the ship in danger. That story goes out, they change the bomb and that's three more ships that are sunk. Where do we draw that line?

Wilson:

Again, I would keep the military out of the media business as much as I could because it's a loser for you everytime you get into it. Just as an enlisted guy, when he's in (trouble) and has a choice between a jury of his fellows or an officer to be his judge at a court martial, would be smart to pick the officer. It's not too much different if you had a panel of senior editors. They would love to be brought out of retirement to act as a Media Review Panel, to serve in the field, and to make some ground rules for a given situation which will probably be different than any we can contemplate. I would first try to get the media to police itself. They'd be tougher on reporters than the military because they know the game. They have a lot of creativity at their disposal: "Your story won't be any worse if there's a 24-hour moratorium than it is if you file it tonight." "You can file it just the way it is, but you've got to wait 24 hours." "Nobody else is going to beat you to it because they are all in this moratorium." The military censor wouldn't think of that because he doesn't deal in our world. I would focus on the question of how we can involve the media in helping us, rather than how we can control the press.



Interviewer:

What kind of teeth would they have?

Wilson:

It can vary. If you have three editors, and I have to give my copy to them before I can send it on the telex, then they would be the censors.

Interviewer:

Suppose you have your own VHF shot.

Wilson:

That's tough. I'd keep the military out of this as much as I could. I would be asking myself, "How could we get the media to do it?," instead of, "How could we get the Army to do it?" There's no reason you could not have a Media Advisory Committee in the States, and they read the copy and say, "This isn't what they approved," and yank his credentials. You are going to have some violations.

Interviewer:

It has been suggested that in the kind of wars we tend to fight, if we yank their credentials, some of the reporters would go around to work on the other side.

Wilson:

No, I don't believe that. They are only going to do that if their editors say it is O.K. I'd go with the guerillas. That's a good story. If I were with a VC unit and filing a story about how they fought, that would be a helluva intelligence coup for you and a helluva good story for me. I don't think it's that big a problem.

Interviewer:

I really like your idea. There are some questions in terms of mechanics.

Wilson:

I understand. We have little keyboards we take with us. We punch our story, in and telephone it into Washington. You had censorship in Syria, but I used to get on the phone and dictate stories from Syria. Mechanically, they couldn't stop it. The ambassador could kick me out of there if he read it in the Post. Point A is to try and find a way to engage the media and the military now. The higher the level, the better. I think I would first try to engage the publishers and the editors with General Meyer and General Vessey.

Interviewer:

There are concerns about protecting our careers. The best defense is to ignore and maybe they'll go away.

Wilson:

Well, that's a tough argument. "Why should I take the chance?" And I have an answer. But I can see why a lot of them would not want to take the chance, especially in peacetime.

Interviewer:

Do you think we have aim and direction and strategy in say, Latin America?

Wilson:

No!

Interviewer:

Are we going to get in deep trouble again with the country?

Wilson:

Yeah. We don't really know what we want to do in Latin America. But that's not your problem, yet.

Interviewer:

By the time it gets to us, you see, we won't have a policy, we won't have a direction, we'll just be there. If there are national interests at stake, if there is a national strategy, it should be articulated in the press.

Wilson:

I think that's going on now. There are going to have to be some decisions and policies agreed upon. Right now I know there aren't any. In fact, they are debating which side we should support. But that's healthy. I'd rather debate it now than after we were there. I think, if nothing else, Vietnam brought that home. We can't go in there without knowing what we are doing.

Interviewer:

If I were Chief of Staff, and you were editor of the Washington Post, and we had that meeting you were talking about, one of the questions I'd ask you is, "Where did we go wrong on the Soviet's use of chemical agents in Afghanistan. I would have thought that as soon as that hit the front page there would have been a big outcry."

Wilson:

You didn't get the experts aboard, first. You went with the release before you had the "smoking gun." It wasn't you the military, it was the civilian policymakers. When you accuse somebody of atrocities, I think you've got to have hard evidence. The fellow who offered an appraisal of the evidence is a pure scientist. He's an expert in chemical warfare and a consultant to the Pentagon. He said that they had not made the case. You go to those guys first and say, "Look and see what we've got." "What do we need?" You can't count on things being automatically granted to you in peacetime. You have to compete, and to compete you have to make your case,

and to make your case you have to talk with all those guys in the media, like it or not.

Interviewer:

In World War II, when we were fully mobilized, war correspondents were given officer privileges, officer status, but not officer rank. One of the things we might consider as available on this continuum of control is to grant some sort of status like that. It may or may not be concomitant with military justice.

Wilson:

What would be the advantage to you? Would we be liable to court martial?

Interviewer:

Maybe it's more subtle than that. Giving you status implies that there exists some sort of a relationship. It's a subtle form of pressure. To at least conform to the general ideals and values of what we are about, and to not be irresponsible. It would be appropriate in the sense that we are trying to lessen the amount of external control, and to rely more heavily on the good nature and fellowship of the media representatives.

Wilson:

I'm thinking about that. I hate to see the problems right away, but I do see a lot of problems. I don't think I like that idea. In a World War II situation, you're living with soldiers for two years. In El Salvador, you send a reporter down there for a month or two. If there is something going on, he stays. If there is not, he comes back up. This twilight zone of military confidence doesn't lend itself to those kind. You want some claim on him. It's too tough to handle, too tough to manage, especially in Latin America where we don't need your Jeep or your chopper. I'll hire some

man with a truck and go do my thing. And you can't impose censorship in El Salvador. It's not your country.

Interviewer:

Even in Germany we don't have a standing host nation agreement for control of the media.

Wilson:

It's their territory.

Interviewer:

If war is not likely but war is a possibility in that area, it is something that should have been addressed already.

Wilson:

Yeah, although we never apply grease until the wheel squeaks. That's certainly legitimate for the agenda. But I think it's a little farther down than these half-wars. Our reporter in Afghanistan does the country an immense amount of good from the point of view of pointing out what the Russians are doing. We spent a lot of money getting him into Afghanistan. All of his reports are anti-Soviet because he is with the only people he could be with, the Afghan guerillas. I think he's a Brit. They wouldn't allow an American in there. So it's not as though a correspondent is all bad for your purposes. I think the American press has done well in Beirut. I would have hated to have to depend strictly on the Israeli party-line to find out what the hell was going on. There is no censorship in a formal sense. The Marines were pretty shrewd here as to who they let spend time with them overnight. There were restrictions from their own command as to how much they could say. But it hasn't been a disaster from the press standpoint, or the military standpoint. To tell the truth about what we are doing is not really all that bad. It's just that when the facts are bad. . . .

Interviewer:

I don't think any of us are advocating that we do it any differently than that. Irresponsibility is what we want to make sure doesn't happen. The other thing, speaking in terms of subtleties, is the pervasiveness of TV and what that does to war reporting. There was a very dramatic picture on the front page of the Post two days ago about the woman with her leg injured in the car bomb incident. There's quite a bit of drama in the picture but, on the other hand, the TV picture of that same incident--the wailing and screaming and all that--impacts much greater in a different way. You can look at the picture on the front page dispassionately, and feel empathy for both sides. But when you have it brought live, the horror of the moment became the visual impact, and obscured the other side. That's the danger, because while war is absolutely not a nice thing, that doesn't have anything to do with whether it's necessary or not.

Wilson:

I have some problems with the TV press, but I don't have problems with dramatic TV coverage that is fair. In other words, if we had had all the "bad" footage about Vietnam before we got into Vietnam, we might not have gotten in there at all, or we would have done it differently. That you show people war is horrible and innocent people suffer. I can't fault, anymore than I can fault a horrible picture of a car accident. Maybe some teenagers will get the word and say, "Hey look, going 90 miles an hour on the BW Parkway isn't such a good idea." So the visual impact, as long as it's fair and representative, I don't have any problem with. And those guys have more impact than I do. To those who say TV provides too much dramatic impact, I just think that's with us. Now you've got to think about how to make it fair.

Interviewer:

The visual impact is cumulative in its impact. A house on fire, the first time we show it, is pretty hot stuff. Now, it's no longer sufficient, to gain visual attention, to just show the house on fire. TV jades the appetite.

Wilson:

You can just get so horrible, then you gotta make it up.

Interviewer:

That's my point.

Wilson:

You can take it just so long, and then it has no effect.

Interviewer:

They say that the TV coverage of the war got so old and people got so damn tired of watching it, they just turned it off. At the end of the war, it turned out that nobody was interested in it *any more*.

Wilson:

I can't argue that, although that would contradict those who say that TV ruined it. Either TV had influence or it didn't. I sometimes think that military officers don't have the full story of how this government went about dealing with the press. Vietnam started out to be a very hard-sell effort by the Pentagon. They thought that, if they flew enough reporters out to Vietnam in the early days, we would write all these stories about, "We gotta get in there." So they were using the press to sell their story of involvement. In those early days, they would fly a reporter all the way from Washington to Vietnam at government expense, and take him around and show him glamorous Green Beret things, and show him a few charts and what could be done if we only put more men in there. And it worked. Those guys all came back and wrote puff stories about if we

Americans got in there. . . . When the habit was formed of showing off how great we were doing in Vietnam then it went sour. We were still there, the facts got bad, and the press suddenly was the enemy. But it started out just the opposite. They were begging us to go out there at their expense to sell this story to the American people. That's really the truth. Art Sylvester was doing that. He was Chief of Public Information at the Pentagon. It was a real Madison Avenue sell.

Interviewer:

I don't blame the guys who were there, Arnett and the rest of them, for turning against what was going on in the briefings, the people who didn't know what was going on trying to pass out handouts. The officials were not giving facts, they were giving you exhortation. The minute you walked out the door you could see contrary facts.

Wilson:

That's why they called it the Five O'Clock Follies. It turned out to be a sales job.

Interviewer:

The issue of body counts. . . .

Wilson:

The whole thing was outrageous. If the press did nothing else, they finally made fun of that body count to the point that you weren't getting guys killed having to go out and count bodies so McNamara could put it in his report. It just enraged me, and it finally stopped partly because the press said how ridiculous it was.

Interviewer:

What we're looking at is the need for control. Do you think that really is valid?



Wilson:

I just think that there's got to be some sort of cooperative agreement. Control connotes to me that you'll tell us what we can do, where we can go, and what we can write. You can't expect a guy like me, who respects the First Amendment, to say "Yeah, I'm for control," unless I really know what you are talking about. If Vessey had his way, control would mean he would sit in his office, hand you a paper, and we'd go write it. I think we need rapprochement and some sort of cooperative relationship. Most military guys are a little edgy when they are dealing with me, but after they retire, they are kinda grateful. I have a lot of friends who are retired military, and they are so grateful that the truth got out. They are uneasy while the process is going on. Of all the things that Weinberger has mishandled, I think he mishandled the anti-nuclear movement the most. I think it is real, it's sincere, and I think it's important. I think that it is powerful, and we don't deal with it by saying, "They are all a bunch of Commies." They filled up Hyde Park with 250,000 people protesting nukes, and I spent the whole day talking to people. They're not nuts. There were women there with baby carriages, saying, "Look, I want my kid to grow up." We've managed to scare those people to death with loose, stupid, careless talk. Haig is saying "... a nuclear shot across the bow," and Reagan is saying to Congress, "Well, I'm not sure we're going to fire off a nuclear shot or not." The NATO Defense Ministers are trying to put down this rebellion in their own countries, and saying, "Let's have a zero option: we'll cut down our missiles, if you cut down your missiles." Weinberger would have nothing to do with it. We just screwed that up. My view is that the religious movement is what killed the MX--that's where the votes came from. They were the newest lobbying pressure in that whole fight which has been going on for 10 years. These church groups have begun

to play hard ball. They represent votes. They are real pressure groups, which they have a right to be. You've got to deal with them. They are a new force. There are any number of ways that Reagan and Weinberger could have handled that. They could have applauded their interests, which they are just belatedly starting to do. They could have said, "We don't want to deploy MX either." "It's not going to be ready until '86." "If the Soviets can find a way to forego deploying their own missile...." You've got to throw out some kind of hope to these people.

End Of Interview

INTERVIEW  
WITH  
MR. GEORGE ESPER  
ASSOCIATED PRESS  
BOSTON, 4 APRIL 1983

Interviewer:

How long were you in Vietnam?

Esper:

I returned in September of '66 for 13 months and then I wanted to get back; 7 months later I went back and remained until 5 weeks after the fall of Saigon in 1975 (June 5th).

Interviewer:

In my two assignments there, I remember the two tours were as different as night and day. How do you see it--what happened?

Esper:

Well, initially what happened in 1965 I think the South Vietnamese were in danger of being defeated. From '63 to '65 the South Vietnamese were taking terrible defeats and were badly chewed up by the Vietcong, the main force units, and there was a lot of political turmoil in the Saigon government and there were several coups, one right after the other. There was instability and they didn't have any popular support as the VietCong did. This coupled with the military defeats were causing major problems. I think the country was in danger of being cut in half and that's when the big US buildup began, of course, and the North Vietnamese introduced their troops into South Vietnam. But at that point in time the US did, with the introduction of the large amount of American troops, stabilize the situation. That might have been the time really to pull out, or at least draw the line on troop commitments, or least start a Vietnamization program,

instead of waiting until 1969. I think a lot of people felt that way, including General Douglas Kinnard, who is now a political science professor, and I think it was in that point in time that some of the higher ranking military officials and some of the higher ranking civilian officials in Washington started to lose their credibility with the press. I think the press did an excellent job in Vietnam. Over the years there were 56 newsmen killed or missing and that indicates newsmen were out in the field with the men trying to get firsthand accounts rather than relying on second-, or third-hand accounts.

Interviewer:

It goes very deep in the psyche of the middle manager and the top manager of the Army. . . .

Esper:

There being no relationship with the press. . . ?

Interviewer:

In our curricula we talk about the exercise of national power. Part of that power is military and another is economic power. Woven throughout this is national will. Quite often the bottom line of our discussions involves the media role in generation of national will. All too often the seminar answer is: "Get the S.O.B.s out of here . . . we don't want the press because all they'll do is lie . . . they emphasized the negative and they'll make us look like fools." Most military men are conservative, most military men are patriotic, most are well meaning, most are doing their best but they are definitely in doubt about the media. The exercise of military power may not be an option as far as national power is concerned unless the entity of the US is threatened in the eyes of the people. The national will may not be there even though it's in the national interest.

Part of the reason for that lies in the impact that the media had in Southeast Asia. I'm trying to draw a parallel train that goes from the '60s and the '70s to today and into the future. Our first question is, "Do you feel that the potential exists for what happened in Vietnam to happen again?"

Esper:

Yes, I do. I really do. I think the potential exists. I think in Vietnam the administration and the Pentagon were often less than frank about what was going on there. They withheld a lot of information; often painted an optimistic picture when, in fact, it was the opposite. There was in effect, a conflict in what reporters were seeing in the field and what they were hearing in the field versus the official statements coming out of Washington and Saigon. I think this could easily happen again. That's why I think the media must have access to the military and some kind of a relationship. Otherwise, you have a form of censorship which I think would be a disaster. I really don't think the public will accept that, and I don't think even a lot of the military would accept that. I think the people serving in the military want their story told. I really do. I know in Vietnam, a lot of units asked us to go out with them. They wanted correspondents to travel with them for one reason or another. I can understand it. I think their story needed to be told because most of these people were very dedicated and were doing a very good job under the worst of conditions. I don't think anyone ever challenged the performance of the military in Vietnam, in that sense. What was challenged was the information system of misleading people.

Interviewer:

Where were you during Tet?

Esper:

I was mostly in Saigon writing the war roundups and collecting information from field reporters, calling the US Command, using communiques, using communications to tie all this together.

Interviewer:

What was your perception of what was going on? Was it defeat and for whom?

Esper:

I think in terms of attrition--in terms of numbers--it was a tremendous defeat for the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese. They took a tremendous number of casualties which, had it been any other force in any other situation, might have crushed it. I think that, psychologically, it was a tremendous victory for the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese. I say this because it forced President Johnson not to seek reelection. It forced Johnson to seek negotiations to start up peace talks which were essentially great for the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong because it gave them a forum for their propaganda for the next 4-1/2 years. These talks went on and they were initially not necessarily serious. They got a bombing halt out of this. Johnson halted the bombing of most of North Vietnam to induce them to move to the peace table. I think in that sense it was a psychological victory, and, in effect, it forced Johnson not to seek reelection, ended his administration, got a bombing halt, and started peace negotiations. I think it also showed that there was no way, short of just demolishing the country, the North Vietnamese could be pushed out of South Vietnam. They were there to stay. I think that they showed that. They reinforced their losses just as quickly as they sustained them and the measure of the war then became the body count which, by the way, I think was the wrong measuring stick.

Interviewer:

What caused that psychological victory? Was it your observation that it was a great defeat militarily, and was that transmitted loud and clear back to the US?

Esper:

Yes, I do. Because we carried all their casualties and we carried all the reports that the Vietcong eventually were pushed out of all these cities and towns and we carried news analysis to that effect. I think the casualties spoke for themselves. They were staggering figures of what had happened to the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese. Actually, I think in many cases, we at the AP were very objective. We didn't really try to say this or that, or draw this conclusion or that conclusion. Our reports were pretty much straightforward down the line. We went out and we did eyewitness accounts of what we saw. We used the US Command communiques because we felt obligated to be objective. Here in the AP, if you're not objective, you're not going to last very long. Our credentials are built on objectivity, essentially, and if we don't fit that mold in the AP we just don't work for the AP because that's what the AP is all about: fairness, and accuracy, and objectivity. So, most of our reports were eyewitness accounts of what people saw in the towns and cities plus, working in with these, anything the US Military Command had to say. I would say that, if a command wanted to make a point and didn't, it was their fault because we were carrying everything in the communiques. We were carrying every news conference that General Westmoreland had. I think we bent over backwards, really, to get every side of it.

Interviewer:

The message was not getting back in the eyes of Johnson and the other people. Do you know there's a strong case being made by several people

that Tet reporting was not objective reporting? I'm not saying that just about AP, but I'm saying as you looked at what else was going on, as you witnessed the other guys, especially the electronic stuff that was getting back and giving a different perception.

Esper:

I don't agree. I think it was very objective. The electronic people were very good, too. I think the pictures are what were shocking. Let me give you one example. Photos caused a tremendous uproar simply by the nature of what they were. One of them was shown on TV, and it was carried by the AP. We didn't fake the picture of the little girl running naked from the napalm. I'm sure these photos brought home the horror of war. But again we just had people out there snapping these. I know time and time again I called the US Command and asked, "How would you assess this?" "Can't we get an intelligence briefing, can we speak to so and so?" I think that one mistake was that often--not always, but often--the senior officers would not go on record by name saying what they wanted to say. I mean this was, in some cases, done on background or attributed to sources, and I think this hurt the military. The fact that they felt it was a victory, and somebody wanted to go on record saying that, we certainly would have carried it. General Westmoreland did. But I'm saying somebody below him, if they wanted to say something, we would have carried it.

Interviewer:

I think that might be another "light at the end of the tunnel" statement. I can look at it another way and say that "Westmoreland claims victory." Would you treat it the same way?

Esper:

Sure. Just about this time Wes Gallagher flew in from NY and conducted an interview with General Westmoreland and it was given massive



play, massive distribution. I, myself, tried to talk with General Westmoreland many times, and also to other senior officials in the command headquarters. When we had people in the field, they would call in a story and we would carry it, and carry right next to it, under it, or in the same story, "The US Command said this," even when it differed. We'd give all accounts of that particular action.

Interviewer:

Do you know General Westmoreland has said that President Johnson would liked to have seen censorship early in the war.

Esper:

I've heard reports of that. President Johnson did want censorship, but how could he justify it? I think it would have been a disaster. I think of what the US is all about, freedom of the press. . . . This is what the Johnson Administration was saying we were fighting for the South Vietnamese for. To gain that freedom, and then to turn around and impose censorship-- I think it would have been a disaster. I can't buy it--not allowing the free flow of dispatches from Saigon. The way it worked there, we filed these stories directly from our office, nobody looking at them. They were just turned into the NY office.

Interviewer:

You reviewed them, however. Wasn't that a form of self-censorship?

Esper:

We reviewed them all for accuracy, fairness, and balance and not only were they reviewed in Saigon but they were reviewed 3-4 times in NY. They could never be sent on a direct circuit. They went to NY on a closed circuit to our Foreign Desk. It was then reviewed by the Foreign Desk editor or his sub-editors. After they finished with it, it was then reviewed by two editors on what we call our General Desk. That's a desk

that controls/distributes the news. So, it went through the hands of a lot of editors.

Interviewer:

Subject to rewrite in each case?

Esper:

Yes, it was. Some of it wasn't. . . .

Interviewer:

Did you ever see it come out the other end with substantive change in the thrust of what was said?

Esper:

Never. I can honestly say to you that no executive editor or manager in NY ever suggested that we handle a story in a certain way. Even though it was edited in NY, the thrust was never changed. We had full support from our NY offices as to what we were doing. The only thing the general manager told us was that we'd better be damn sure we're accurate.

Interviewer:

Did you ever find there was a story that was too shaky to be sent forward, a report from the field concerning atrocities that could not be substantiated, for instance?

Esper:

Yes, we wrestled with these all the time. It happened all the time. You'd be amazed at the amount of checking that we did, particularly from the Vietnam sources. We would never go with anything they gave us until we had thoroughly checked it out. We had a standing rule that we always checked in with the US Military Command. I'm saying this to point out how we tried to be fair and accurate. Let's say I had a report from a Vietnam stringer that there was a mistaken bombing and 40 civilians were killed, or that there was an atrocity. I would immediately call the US Command and

say, "Here is what I heard." I would hold up the story generally until I heard "It's not true." Most of the time, I trusted them on these things, and most of the time they were very good about this. They'd never come forth with this information, they never volunteered it. But I found that, when you asked them, they would come forth with the information. Most times, I found, there was usually a grain of truth in these things. Often the Vietnam reports were exaggerated. Something had happened, but not often on the magnitude the Vietnamese claimed. The other thing is, often the Command would ask, "Why do you carry these Vietcong broadcasts, or the North Vietnamese broadcasts?" We had no access to the North Vietnamese or Vietcong side whatsoever, and again, in trying to be fair and balanced, we did try to carry some of their radio reports. Again, we always checked with the US Command. They always had the standard response, "We don't comment on Vietcong radio broadcasts." I think they should have. They should have said, "It's incorrect," or denied it, or something. But, they wouldn't comment, therefore, . . . .

Interviewer:

Why do you think not?

Esper:

In many cases the Vietcong had something that actually happened, but they used it for propaganda purposes and, instead of trying to report it straight away on their broadcasts, they'd embellish it, exaggerate it. We saw they were trying to use it for propaganda. We just tossed out all the propaganda. We just tried to get the element of truth and go with that, and disregard all that propaganda. I think that, if the US Command had beaten it to the punch, it would have taken all the steam out of it and nobody would have paid any attention to the Vietcong or the North Vietnamese. For example, they reported My Lai. I tell you a lot of people paid

no attention to that and said, "Ah, this is just another Vietcong or North Vietnamese propaganda broadcast." It was a year later before anyone really uncovered this story.

Interviewer:

Were you ever told not to report something?

Esper:

No, never. It's to the credit of the US military they never asked me to report anything. They never really tried to put any pressure on me not to report anything. There were times when they would say, "I think you are making a mistake; I think you should look at it this way," but never any threats made or any implications that if I didn't report it this way I'd be in trouble. And, I must say our NY office never told us to report anything in any particular way. It just told us that we'd better be accurate.

Interviewer:

What explains this attitude of antagonism toward the press by the military? What you're saying is a reasonable, rational view that no one can argue with. But, what happened?

Esper:

I think there was a time when there was a lack of understanding of what the normal media role was and what our role was. I think that in most cases, at least to my knowledge, the military perceived the press as being critical of operations, and that kind of thing. Actually we weren't. I think we were really trying to report the human aspects of the war more so than the tactics, or the strategies. But I don't think any newsman out in the field was trying to say do an analysis on your battalion. That's pretty small stuff given an overall view of the war. I saw things in the field that I didn't think were particularly newsworthy that might involve the personal conduct of a commander or some of the troops. I didn't see

them as being that newsworthy. I think there needs to be a better understanding. I think the military sees itself on one side and the media on another. I don't think it necessarily has to be that way.

Interviewer:

Then, why is that?

Esper:

Lack of trust, perhaps, or a feeling that "I'm going to get burned." From a newsman's side, "I don't trust this guy; he's gonna mislead me."

Interviewer:

It happened frequently enough that it's ingrained--deeply.

Esper:

I think it started in the early '60s and John Paul Vann and other people were witnessing things in the field but the mission in Saigon was saying just the opposite, turning defeats into victories. This is where I think the US mission--and I'm not talking about officers in the field like yourself who had credibility, I'm talking about the machine, the organization inside Saigon or Washington which controlled a lot of the distribution--lacked credibility with the press. I think this stemmed from President Johnson. There's an official memo in the Pentagon Papers that shows, when the big troop buildup began, that Johnson did not want to concede that it was a change in American policy. He wanted to go in the back door. This is documented in the Pentagon Papers, and he lost his credibility that way. I think some people give the press more credit for creating situations that we really deserve or perhaps having impact that we really don't, at times. I don't think that we really shape the actions of governments. I don't think what we write tells them that they should fight on or not fight on. I don't agree with you on the concept that the North Vietnamese read the press reports the US was pulling out and, therefore, they should

hang in there. I think from research I've done, that the people here couldn't relate to that country that was 10,000 miles away. They couldn't relate to this. Some saw the Vietnamese as little people in black pajamas we couldn't take seriously. They were no threat to the US. They just couldn't really get excited about supporting this kind of war. I sensed, when the hostage situation occurred, that people were pretty excited about that.

Interviewer:

Since we are an Army of the people, more so than any other nation, perhaps the attack of the institution, i.e., the government and its policies which we were serving, by the media was an attack on me. How does that theory hold? That by attacking the institution it caused me to doubt myself and ask, "What the hell am I doing here?" Now, let's take the excesses brought by the media and the military itself. By putting war on the dining room table, as TV did, some say that that may serve to counter the intent of forcing peaceful alternatives to war. Instead repetition made people immune to the horror of war. If these things are true, perhaps some form of control is necessary if we have to prosecute another war. Now, there are two types of control. There's control for the safety of those involved, and for certain aspects of operations. All those things were tightly controlled. Then there's the subtle type of control. Not so much on the protection of troops, but for the protection and generation of national will, regardless of the policy. That's what I'd like you to talk to, if you will.

Esper:

Sure. I feel to have this limited access is treading on very dangerous ground. I would agree that some kind of restriction is necessary. You're, in effect, creating some kind of dictatorship or propaganda

machine. You are cutting out the public who have sons and husbands in the Army. You are really creating, for the wrong reasons, a small dictatorship that could easily get out of hand. I would go along with you. I don't think there is any good newsman who would want to jeopardize American troops by reporting troop movements before they are completed, nor would we want to report a pilot shot down before a rescue mission. I don't feel that is so urgent that they'd have to rush to the wire with that. As long as delay is justifiable, and as long as a security problem does exist.

Interviewer:

The other side of that is the North perceived from what we were saying about their war that if they held out long enough they were going to win.

Esper:

I think that in 1963 when the ARVN started suffering these heavy defeats the newsman who were then in Saigon were reporting these because they were out with the units and they were getting some good information for example from people like John Paul Vann who was very forthright. When they filed their reports, they didn't agree with the US Mission in Saigon and that created a lot of friction. As a matter of fact, there were several attempts made to have reporters reassigned. This didn't work, they were unsuccessful. There were attempts made to discredit reporters. Some of us were called too young, too inexperienced. We were accused of being sensational. I really think the press was vilified for telling the truth. I think we painted a more realistic picture of what was going on there than the US Government.

Interviewer:

Could you say it this way? That it is not fair to say, (1) that the press lost the war for us in Vietnam; or (2) that they really even influenced the public opinion to the point that they made us get out. Although I

think that sometimes the media would like to feel they did, I'm not so sure they did. The most important thing I think you've said, was that when the Government changed from trying to tell the truth to trying to exhort the people, to be a cheerleader, is when the media said "That's not our job."

Esper:

Exactly!

Interviewer:

The problem that we've got is that we, the leadership of the military, that an adversary relationship exists between us, and the only solution is to get you at arms length, and, if possible, put you in another room and shut the door. That the only workable relationship there can be with the media, is that there be no relationship. Do you think that is a fair approximation of the attitude?

Esper:

Absolutely.

End Of Interview



INTERVIEW  
WITH  
MR. DREW MIDDLETON  
MILITARY CORRESPONDENT, NEW YORK TIMES  
NEW YORK, 6 APRIL 1983

Interviewer:

Let's suppose, hypothetically for one reason or another, acceptable or unacceptable, it became necessary to establish some form of control over the media. There's a whole spectrum of control that runs from accreditation to absolute control of copy. From your perspective of an awful lot of experience, what form would you see?

Middleton:

If you get into a major war, obviously you are going to have to have censorship. I'm talking about a war with Russia, conventional or nuclear. There's no doubt in my mind that you'll have to have it. I'll add to that the fact that complete censorship in the theatres I was in, the Mediterranean and northwest Europe in World War II, had its obvious disadvantages from a correspondent's standpoint. It had one advantage which we never enjoyed in Korea or Vietnam--complete frankness on the part of commanders because they knew every word was censored. Once you left the theatre and went home on leave in the US you swore to keep quiet about things that were off the record in Europe or the Mediterranean and with two exceptions that happened. Two fellows blew it, but they did nothing big. One disclosed that Eisenhower was in communication with Stalin and the other was what would be called an operational secret. But it did happen, and these two correspondents weren't allowed back in the theatre, period. On the other hand, to repeat, you got a hell of a good briefing anytime you went. The

morning before the German attack at Montaigne, Bradley had the people with the Army Group and First Army in and gave them a complete run-down of the German troops involved, where they would strike and what our reaction would be. The only thing he left out, which he didn't know at the time, was that the British were going to bring in Typhoons with rockets, which was the first time they were used against tanks. Very effectively too. We thought of course, our intelligence is great. We didn't realize that they'd been reading Ultra stuff. At any rate, that's the sort of frankness we got and we were accustomed to it. Of course, as the war went on and as we began to win more, the censorship was greatly relaxed. Naturally you couldn't talk about future plans, but you could describe a battle in considerable detail and name units, both ours and theirs, once the commanders were convinced prisoners had been taken or the unit had been identified by the enemy. I see your problem, and I'm damned if I know how you are going to find any ground between censorship and non-censorship. I don't see how you could control it. For one thing you've got a new media--television--which just by cutting can provide what I sometimes regard as false news. And how you're going to follow the editors into the offices, into the buildings and see what they cut and what they leave in, I'm damned if I know. I think that's going to be one of your major problems.

Interviewer:

I think that is the biggest fear of our classmates too, because they talk about how they just can't trust T.V. They don't talk about the printed media. They talk about T.V. and the electronic media.

Middleton:

It was significant in Vietnam. I was there three times, never for long, six-seven weeks at a time, and I found it far harder to get information from commanders than it had been in World War II, quite rightly,

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THE MILITARY AND THE MEDIA: A NEED FOR CONTROL(U) ARMY  
WAR COLL CARLISLE BARRACKS PA D H ROGERS ET AL.  
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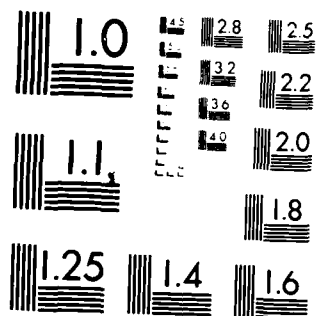
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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS 1963-A

because they knew that everything that was printed in the US was bounced back to Hanoi and they were very careful about what they said.

Interviewer:

There is another impact. Not only did it go to Hanoi, which was harder to judge, but it went to the boss and the boss was a very sensitive man.

Middleton:

Yes, he was.

Interviewer:

And I think you implied in your article (Sunday Times, January 1983), that in a way it's careerism, and in another way it's self-protection. I think what you're saying is that both impact.

Middleton:

Johnson was responsible for it. If Johnson had declared war, he could have done anything he wanted. He could impose censorship.

Interviewer:

Didn't he say that to General Westmoreland? That if he had to do it over again, he would have imposed censorship.

Middleton:

Yes, that's right. But that meant a declaration of war, and he was afraid to do it.

Interviewer:

I lot of people don't know that. They don't know that it's within the law that we can impose censorship. What do you think about censorship in other than general war situations?

Middleton:

Limited war, that's what I've been worried about. Suppose we get into a war in the Persian Gulf, which seems to me from what I hear in Washington, is one of the things they worry about. Hell, I don't blame them. I

don't know what the hell you would do. For one thing you would land some people in Saudi Arabia, open country; unless they're at war, which is possible, how can you censor the stuff coming out? You people could dummy up on us and you probably would to protect yourselves. But if there are two regiments of tanks there, and the boys can talk to the people, or even if they can't talk to them, those two regiments of tanks will be reported if there's no censorship. You can't control communications today on the ground. If our guy is in Saudi Arabia and can't send it, he'll go up to Kuwait and send it.

Interviewer:

In South Vietnam, we had over 600 newsman accredited. Generally, anybody who could carry a typewriter became an accredited newsman. What do you think about controlling who goes to war as a reporter?

Middleton:

That's one of the first things I noticed when I went over there. Half these people were just there on spec. They weren't assigned anything, they were just free-lancers and they had nothing to lose. The bigger the sensation they made with their stories, the more sure they were of getting further orders, and a lot of them did just that.

Interviewer:

And that's what seems to us to be the softest ground--not so much the giving away of secrets. A reporter gives away secrets then I think we have grounds to do something.

Middleton:

Sure.

Interviewer:

I'm talking about the reporter who somehow or another does things in such a way that he begins to erode. . . . That's very hard to say

without coming out wrong. As to where is that line, it's an ethical line . . . we talked about it on earlier interviews and that's where the biggest potential for abuse is--television.

Middleton:

That's one of their problems, and one of yours but the newsworthy is visual and it doesn't matter whether there's any guts in the story.

Interviewer:

And I don't know how the military can control them.

Middleton:

Neither do I.

Interviewer:

It is better if we say, OK the guys you can count on are the major networks, whoever we pick them out to be. Because right now, the way the plans are written, a local TV station from Savannah, GA has just as much right to be there as an accredited guy from NBC or CBS or of the calibre of Peter Jennings, who gives very balanced programs; he's very careful because he has his reputation, which is considerable, and he has credibility at stake. But the kid from Savannah, he'd like to see his story at any cost. . . . An example: the correspondent who had the chance on the Falkland Islands to get ahead of the troops and to be the first to go into the center of Port Stanley.

Middleton:

Max Hastings.

Interviewer:

Yes, and that created quite a bit of trouble with his contemporaries and the point is to me that therein lies a secret. Is this the way to get at the control problem?

Middleton:

I agree with that, but if you're talking about colleagues and contemporaries, you've got to go up the ladder. Without censorship, it's going to be damned difficult to control people and correspondents in the field. The approach has got to be to the editors. After all, it's the editor who run the paper. And the greatest power on the NY Times is the executive editor who lays out the front page.

Interviewer:

To accomplish this, you see a colloquium that runs across media?

Middleton:

I think you would have to get something comparable to the Press Council of England. That would be tough because this is a much bigger country. But the Press Council was told by the Chiefs of Staff, in the Falklands Crisis for instance, what was going on and what should and should not be published. That didn't save a hell of a lot, but the responsible papers, namely the Times, The Guardian, The Telegraph, The Scotsman and three or four other provincial papers kept by the rules pretty well. It was the popular papers that said "to hell with it," and would print any advance bit of news they had, even if it didn't come from their correspondents. One of the things they did was to pick up the Reuter's wire from Buenos Aires and write that as hard news.

Interviewer:

There were several instances of correspondents trying to circumvent the system, by flying in or taking boats from Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil or Chile but they were thwarted before they could get to the Falklands.

Middleton:

That's true. And CBS was going to hire a ship and go down with the task force with "CBS" painted in large white letters on the side. The



admiralty wasn't playing and they said "No, we have enough to do without giving you any protection," so they didn't make it.

Interviewer:

This is a difficult area to talk about but I would appreciate your view. Your's and George Wilson's perceptions are a lot alike. You represent success, are close to the same generation. We may have made a mistake in that we haven't talked to enough people who are so hungry they would do almost anything to get a story.

Middleton:

Well those groups are not on the surface now, they'll come out when the balloon goes up.

Interviewer:

We have read the official release from MoD, and the feeling we have is that sometimes the press is ducking the real issues.

Middleton:

Well, I was there during the whole conflict. I went over a year ago, but I was doing analysis and it was a little easier for me because I'd known these guys when they were lieutenant commanders, majors and wing commanders and I could get to them. My impression since 1938 dealing with the Brits, is that if they know they're not going to be quoted or even that its not going to be attributed to "a senior Naval officer" or something, they'll tell you anything.

Interviewer:

Our military is the same way.

Middleton:

You want an example of that? I went down to see the Chief of the Military Staff one afternoon and it was just when the British papers had gone hog wild on the idea that the whole war was going to be fought with

hit-and-run raids. The SAS had just made a very successful raid and I asked Terry about this, and he laughed like hell.

No, he said. Don't they read what happened in South Georgia which they'd taken. They had their best troops there, the Marines, and we hit them and they dissolved. And we're going to hit 'em and their going to dissolve. We can't tell you where, but don't go for this hit-and-run stuff.

And of course he was right. But the papers feasted on it. And it was solely on the basis of the one very successful raid, where they blew up the ammo depot. . . . To get back to something I mentioned before. A control, I think, has got to be on two levels. We're talking about a limited war now, in which we haven't issued a declaration of war. It's disguised as something else. You then have got to deal with the editors and publishers, maybe combined, and it'll take a hell of a lot of work to set it up. It'll take an awful amount of telephoning; might work.

And you must also think about the editors. Be on intimate terms with them, so you can call the guy up by his first name and say, "Look, this is what happened and in the public interest it shouldn't be in the papers." That's the way the British do when they use the "D" notice system. They send the "D" notices around to the papers and also call the publishers and the managing editors.

Interviewer:

But we can't lie when we do that. And I've heard from more than one reporter that even Kissinger intentionally misled the press at this point.

Middleton:

Oh I agree about Kissinger certainly. I wouldn't trust him if he were tattooed with Bible pictures. I've had plenty of military people I can't tell about, but very rarely has anyone lied to me.

Interviewer:

Well how do we restore lost trust between the military and the media? Many of our classmates are going to be general officers in a few years, and if they have this ill feeling right now, how do we change that before they start passing this on to their subordinates in command?

Middleton:

The Army, especially, has got to make editors know that this is a helluva important career field, and it can't be fobbed off, as it so often is, on some kid who has no experience with the military at all, who is hyped up on investigative reporting, and who thinks that the worst story is going to be the best story. There are a hell of a lot of people like that. And I think the Army--and I might say all the services--ought to get to publishers and editors. I took Abe, our executive editor, up to Newport, eight or nine years ago. They had a military-media conference up there at the Naval War College. And I think it went well. Here was the editor of, what I think is, the best paper in the country talking about his problems and they were talking about their problems. It lasted far longer than anybody . . . there were many questions and it was very stimulating. Gave them something to think about. We have people like Shy Meyer here for lunch at the paper. He does damn well at trying to plant the seed that we've got to have good people covering the military just as good as we have covering the stock market or the White House. Unfortunately, I would say, in 49% of the papers in the country and on television stations, they've got the people with no experience and therefore little judgement.

Interviewer:

When you went on the exercise you just finished in the Carribean, who was with you, and how did you get there? Did you ask to go?

Middleton:

The Navy sent around a circular, and I hadn't spent much time with the Navy, and I thought it would be a good time to go. And it was; it was fairly rewarding. I got three stories out of it. I didn't expect to get much more. The composition of the group was what surprised me. There were two people from Syracuse (television), two people from the local station in Orlando. I don't think any of the major networks was represented. The written press and the television people were lumped together, and their needs are completely different. Half way through, one of the television kids from Orlando says, "We're not going to run this stuff until May." This was the end of March.

Interviewer:

Without the draft, we have Congressmen, some newsmen, a lot of people who know very little about the military, but have inordinate influence-- would you comment?

Middleton:

Absolutely, that was one of the problems in the Falklands, you had a whole generation. The Brits weren't in Vietnam, but were, on a small scale, in Korea. There again, that's a long time ago now, 30 yrs ago. And the guys who were in Korea, as correspondents, are probably all retired. There was a real lack of knowledge. I talked to some of the guys before they went. They didn't know what in the hell was going to happen. They thought it was going to be a replay of D-day. It wasn't, fortunately.

Interviewer:

But it was still pretty tough work for them. Some of them couldn't keep up.

Middleton:

Well, that's true. And some people didn't understand. Course, it's pretty tough to keep up with the Royal Marines and Para's. I gather they set quite a pace.

Interviewer:

It has been suggested that the military invite reporters down and let them work out with this particular unit. Perhaps there's nothing in it for the press, it's too one sided, it's a not a big enough carrot. How do you feel?

Middleton:

You're up against two things here. One is, only a big paper or a rich paper (and the two don't always go together) can afford to have a military correspondent, or a man covering the Pentagon. Usually they rely on the agencies. They pop up when NATO does "Reforger," and then you get guys from all over the country. They're chiefly interested in local stories, for example the National Guard division which has two Battalions over there. I've seen that happen many times. You don't get those fellows working with you on a permanent basis.

Interviewer:

Do you see a conflict in the military squiring correspondents around?

Middleton:

I know of no outfit that's more serious than the Times about that. But if I go to "Reforger," I go with a plane carrying troops, so I can see the thing from the time they get on to the time they land. Then I come back usually with a Medivac flight for the same reason, to see how it works. The paper hasn't got any beef about that. They certainly would, if somebody said "We'll pay your way out to Ft. Hood to see something." No we couldn't take that. But there are subtleties in that situation, if you're

doing something that you need, like flying hours. I was going out to the National Training Center last April, when the Falklands thing blew up. And I'm going to try to go next month if I don't go to China. I'd like to reiterate that you should try to preach to the editors and publishers that they ought to have more people interested in covering military things. You go to Germany to a town like Stuttgart. It has three military correspondents, air, ground, and naval; circulation of maybe 100,000. But we don't have that. The only place you see that is in someplace like Norfolk where they have a big military population. How many military correspondents are in the country? Baltimore Sun, Washington Post, NY Times, LA Times. That's ridiculous.

Interviewer:

Except when you understand the American psyche. . . .

Middleton:

Well, also you have to understand the newspaper business. We and those papers are the only ones who would give space to those sort of things. I think those other papers are wrong, because I think even with a professional Army, people are interested in what the kids are doing. Draft armies are the same--everybody's there. But I think they are interested. I have a place on Lake Champlain where I go every summer. I read a terrible newspaper called the Plattsburg Republican, but they must fill up two columns a couple of times a week with items that are sent out from Ft. Hood or Ft. Ord about: so-and-so has made captain, or corporal, or something like that. That's good publicity. It's not in line with the major things you're thinking of, but it's good publicity for the Army. And it's a helluva lot different from the time when the kids came home from Vietnam, and they wouldn't wear their uniforms.

Interviewer:

Even if the President and all his advisors, down through the Chiefs of Staff, believe that our national interests are well served in El Salvador, it's going to be very difficult. What do you think?

Middleton:

The tale will take good telling as the journalists say, but on the other hand you're not going to need a helluva of help. From what I can see down there last month, a good brigade could do the whole thing.

Interviewer:

We've been into those situations before and even getting a brigade there, the public outcry would be very loud.

Middleton:

I'm not talking about that. I'm just saying, if you decided to go in, you wouldn't need anything like the numbers in Vietnam. It'd be small. Bad as the Salvador Army is, the prisoners were good witnesses, and that was pretty sad too.

Interviewer:

Let's suppose we got that brigade down there. How are we going to control the six to eight hundred media that might show up?

Middleton:

You'd have to give them rules first, before they left. You have to figure that, also, the geographical situation in El Salvador is such that somebody can step across to Costa Rica and blow the whole story. And if its a big enough story, he won't care if he's admitted back in after he records it.

Interviewer:

Is that the price he would have to pay?

Middleton:

Well, that's up to you what price he would have to pay. I would think it would be the price that he would no longer be accredited. That was the price in World War II. You got out of the theatre and blew something, you couldn't come back in without accreditation.

Interviewer:

Did it affect your Times?

Middleton:

We weren't affected. It was Red Miller and others.

Interviewer:

That was individual censorship. A censoring of him. Did it affect his paper? Did they say, "Not only you, but nobody else from that paper, is coming?"

Middleton:

Well, after a slight delay they got people back in. Both incidents came after the January battles, which really settled the thing and we were moving into Germany after the Bulge.

Interviewer:

What I read is an interview with Bobby Inman, which is rather neat the way the interviewer did it. It started off by talking about German espionage involvement in World War II, the significance of their involvement, and how it has come to light that they were entrenched fairly deeply in the Chicago Tribune and in other places. The interviewer asked Inman for his comparison of the German espionage efforts then and the KGB now. Making his transition quite nicely, the reporter's point was that if the Abwehr penetrated a major newspaper with their expertise, how has the KGB done with theirs?



Middleton:

I think the KGB is better than the Abwehr was because for one thing it's got complete confidence, as I gather, of the people up top, which the Abwehr didn't have, and there is a helluva lot more of them. And this society is not at war. If I were a KGB colonel, I would be willing to pay to live in this country. Look at the stuff in the papers, in the technical manuals.

Interviewer:

There is just too much to digest.

Middleton:

Yes, that's why they need so many people. Let's get back to this limited war. Let's get back to Salvador.

Interviewer:

Why do you feel that you can work within that environment (a controlled one) and someone else cannot?

Middleton:

Of course, I always have I suppose. First I find the military generally very laudible people. As I said before, they may not tell you something, but they won't lie. Maybe once or twice, but those guys weren't heavyweights. Secondly, my feeling is that, if you're in the military, you've got to be there. You've got to talk to them all the time. You've got to build up confidence and they in turn build up confidence with you. I think that as a result of my own experience as a loyal American, I don't want to see military secrets given out. I don't think they're worth a headline, in most cases. To go back to this World War II thing. I never worked in the Pacific, but I heard plenty of "bleeps" from people there who did, about manipulation of news by MacArthur and his boys. And they weren't very nice stories.

Interviewer:

Governments for the last ten years have been characterized by manipulation of the news and that has to change if we are to have any sort of a relationship.

Middleton:

On the other hand, if you've got a great leader, and a situation which can be censored then you've got the combination. Churchill was all for admitting bad news; not the more the merrier, but he used to fight with the admiralty all the time. A ship is sunk, and the Germans sank it. They know it. Let's announce it, for God's sake. Don't let them announce it first. Which, again, is something you'll have to think about. Suppose you did land a brigade in Salvador. The Anti's would come out and say it's a division. You've got to be able to say, "No, it's a brigade. We'll show you the brigade."

Interviewer:

I know that, somehow or other, we can't let any person make his reputation at our country's expense.

Middleton:

Well, these are very good sentiments. I'm just thinking of how you're going to stop it.

Interviewer:

I was just going to ask you that.

Middleton:

One thing you've got to do is urge the publishers and editors to get a better type of guy to cover this type of thing, because the people who cover the next limited war are the people who are covering the military now. They'll be the only ones who know anything about it. They won't know much, but they'll know it a lot better than some kid off the city desk.

Interviewer:

Can you do that with restrictions?

Middleton:

No, I mean just cultivate the editors and publishers and try to tell them, "Look, we face a world in which there are crises and we don't know when one of them is going to explode." "We want to have it well covered, and so do you." "So right now put people on the military beat." Another thing the services will have to do. They'll have to be much more selective about the guys they allow to go, and "Reforger" every year is a good example of that. The people who go are really interested in what's going on. Not interested in a free trip to Europe. There are a lot of those you know.

Interviewer:

What do you think about a Media Control Board? It has been said that, at some point, a Media Control Board would have to emerge prior to a conflict.

Middleton:

Take out "Control" right away. Media Advisory Board.

Interviewer:

It has to cross disciplines. That, of itself, is a disciplinary measure, because when the eight guys around the table say, "Look, wait a minute." "That's not news." "What you're talking about is just excitement." Still, I don't see them as being some sort of a bunch that screens the mail. They're almost like Ombudsmen. They're almost like wise heads, and they're almost like "kitchen cabinet" back in Roosevelt days. And I think that's one of the things that has cogency. If it comes time to control the media, I, the military do not want to do that, because you are going to doubt my motives. And I would prefer that you, the media, do

that. You do that, based on simple rules, such as troop movement and endangering lives, and that sort of thing

Middleton:

You'd have to provide an explanation first, of why you're doing it. Not to the correspondents, but to the people upstairs. I must be a bore on this. I keep coming back to the editors and publishers who are the guys who count. They'll be the ones who select the people that go to El Salvador. They'll be the people that'll play the stories when they come back. Anyway, but I think that the period, certainly in the newspapers, engendered by Watergate produced this whole generation of investigative reporters which is a silly name. Any reporter is an investigative reporter. I think that's dying out a little. It certainly died here years ago. The emphasis in this paper is, "By God, if you have a story, you've not only got to have the facts, but you've got to have quotations from people who say this is what happened, now this is what's happening." Plus the fact that we, like all newspapers, are more and more questioning than we used to be. It's obvious why. Television and radio can beat us on who, where, when, and what, so we've got to tell why. We think we're better equipped to do it; therefore, the analysis pieces. Reston writes two columns a week I write twelve columns a month which are really columns but we call them military analyses. And that's the way the newspaper is going to go. That's one of the problems you'll have to keep in mind because you'll have more and more people who aren't interested in spot news like what the division did but why they did it. Why it was able to win. And that takes better reporting on our side, it also takes better explanation on yours.

Interviewer:

You've seen us go through some pretty interesting sine curves. What do you see now?

Middleton:

I think the Army is in pretty good shape when you consider what it was ten years ago, damn good shape. I think there's a pretty good difference between 7th Army Europe and maybe that corps down at Hood, and some of the other divisions. But the general readiness, seems to me, to be up wherever I go. Much much farther along than seven or eight years ago. But, of course, you've got some good staff now. The thing that always appalls me in Europe is the state of the transport. I think command is a helluva lot better than it was. I don't think you've gotten over the hump with the black soldier yet, but I think you're a lot farther ahead than you were. I think one of the best things that Shy has done is the Cohort system.

End Of Interview

INTERVIEW  
WITH  
BRIGADIER D. J. RAMSBOTHAM  
CHIEF OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, BRITISH ARMY  
LONDON, 11 APRIL 1983

Interviewer:

Let me explain what we're doing. The auspices under which we're operating is, first, we're from the Army War College and we're required to do a military study that will have some value to the Army. The thrust of study goes back to our survey of the really abysmal conditions that exist in terms of the relationship between the military and the media. And it came to us loud and clear during our course of instruction when we talked about generation of public will, sustainment of public will, and the requirement for national will. The opinion of many of our classmates, hands down, is: we're dealing with a bunch of rabble who are out to get us. And the fact of the matter is, if you deal with the press your career is on line. If you say something and it gets into print and it's a negative statement--you're dead. The media believes they are serving the greater public need and they don't believe they get into character assassinations or that they are out to paint us to look foolish. We, the three of us, tend to believe that. It's a sad that an adversary relationship exists. It really came to a head during Vietnam. Many of who were there feel that Vietnam was lost directly as a result of media involvement. We, here, don't think that's true, but many others do. That's very serious state of affairs because what that does within our government is takes away the ability to use military power as an instrument of national power. For example, El Salvador is automatically compared to Vietnam by many people,

then the nation will rise or fall based on media support. It comes to this: most of our contemporaries would rather have no media at all. That after the war is over, our contemporaries say, we'll tell them who has won and let them go out and print that. We do believe that some form of control is necessary however. Control runs from the left side of the continuum, merely getting the names of who is reporting to the right side of the continuum blue-pencil, razoring the lines out--total censorship. We feel we can look at the Falklands as a case study and learn the lessons from that and see if there is anything that can be taken back and recommended to our government as some possible courses of action. We've talked to media and military in the states and we're doing the same here. Now, first off do you think the public's right to know impinged upon by the policies of media control used in the Falklands?

Ramsbotham:

Yes, that's my starting point. See, I don't really think there really is such a thing as a 'right to know' anyway. But, I qualify that in that I don't think there is a right to suppress either. But I would qualify both those by saying that I think there is an absolute right to ask a question but I also think there is an absolute right to refuse to answer questions. And, I can explain why. And, I've discussed this philosophically with the media as well: no right to know; no right to suppress; the right to ask questions; the right to refuse provided you explain why. Now, we in the military are in a dilemma here because I think that so far as military operations are concerned we can explain why we are refusing quite simply by either, it is going to effect the security of an operation or the method of carrying it out, or it will effect the lives of those taking part. Now, particularly, if you have journalists with you--their own lives are at risk and it is explained to them why they should not do it. Then you're all

right and they will probably not give away information that will affect them. But, that's a military imperative--there's a military reason--I mean an end to why you are insisting on these things. However, when you switch across to being political in a democracy, the right to question a government or its policies or its decisions it has suddenly become very sacred or very dear to us and we hadn't better lose it. And where I think the Falklands brought this to a head--because nobody thought it through--is that we are trying to apply the military imperatives that we have learned in Northern Ireland and worked with the Press in Northern Ireland but the Press understood it and accepted it where the politicians were trying to apply those same military imperatives to political decisions--I suppose the classic case in point for programs, you asked me to give evidence of that, was the Panorama Program--which was a method--where they had some of the opposition to the government's line; in fact, the program is 50 minutes long and if you look at it there's 20 minutes of the opposition side and 30 minutes of the pro side. And balance, what is balance? What is that--nobody uses such a thing. The press believes the government is trying to impose the same restrictions that the military could for political reasons. So, that's where they throw up the hackles and we never got that dividing line straight. I absolutely take your point about accessibility; you cannot conduct operations unless they are acceptable to the great bulk of the population and the people who make these acceptable give you the good will to do. Then, is in fact, the media. They are the only people who can pass on the information. We've also been to Vietnam and I've discussed this at great length with a chap named Robert Elegant, whose articles you may or may not have read, who was there for 20 years, who says quite categorically that it was the media who lost the Vietnam War because the will of the American people was undermined to such an extent that they no longer



supported the war. You probably know this better than I. I wonder if it sounds much too extreme to say they were solely responsible but I am sure they were a very major factor. But, there's no doubt that your experience with the media in Vietnam colored us to a certain extent--particularly, TV, which I think is probably the least effective war-reporting media, anyway. As far as reporting a war it's the most visual--it is the one that can change public opinion most and is the least effective, as a report. So, where do we go? Well, first of all, we have a Northern Ireland experience--which we've had now for 14 years. And, we've learned in a different way how to deal with the press--we've acknowledged that they have been there--our first company efforts I am sure you'll remember when we had people coming on TV who said, 'why the hell don't you fuck off around the corner and leave me fucking alone!' But, we had to change that because that was then seen by a great majority of the British public, during tea time. So, we learned to accommodate them and I think that the credit we are given for dealing with the Press in Northern Ireland is, basically, our willingness to take them into our confidence and to explain to them the parameters of what we are doing and why we do not want things reported because it could lead to--which goes back to my original thing of explaining why . . . that's the sole basis of our representation. We've been prepared to see them, we have talked to them, we have been prepared to take them into our confidence and let them know perhaps more than what we might, normally on the grounds that this is a military operation and, please respect this. The only time this was ever broken was by a journalist out that day because somebody rang up his editor and had him out. Now, we may have been lucky in Northern Ireland--of course, it's a very small affair compared to VN--but I think that's the sort philosophy fought and the principle is there. Now, as far as the Falklands is concerned I think that we have a number of major

lessons out there. First thing, I think--and I want to be quite clear there will never be another Falklands--because it's the only way the journalists can get there is on our ships, communicate with our communications for there's no way of going into a Marriott hotel and back out again and getting onto a telex--but, I think that there are five major lessons that we can get out of the war. And, I put them in no order of priority. The first one is, you must have a plan. And, therefore, because nobody thought the media plan through in advance, we were utterly ill-prepared. So this is what we are now setting about. I think there are various things about this plan--it must be simple and it must, I think, made up of three particular parts. The first one, is accreditation and handling which is you must make quite clear that the journalist that you are going to give facilities to are those that the editors wish to have sent you and in return for you giving them facilities, they've got to abide by certain restrictions. Now having said that, that can only apply when hostilities have broken out and until they have broken out (I'll come to NATO in a moment). I don't believe it is realistic or sensible to think that accreditation will mean anything because there hundreds of people who can get there and swarm there, they'll have a journalist card and demand certain rights and so on. But, the second thing--the issue is the handling that you've got. You got to have an organization that is capable of handling the journalist. The way people talk about numbers to me and say don't you think that 28 correspondents in the Falklands is disproportionate? I remind them that 1500 turned up at the Rhine-Main airport to greet the returning hostages from Tehran--so, what is a lot? So that's accreditation and handling. The next thing is communications. You've got to think through how they can communicate. Either communications you provide or communications they provide. And, finally censorship and control which we

will discuss separately. Those, I think are the three parts of any media plan. And we can break that down to subsections--just out of interest, the way that we are doing this and working out this is two things. One is, our staff college this year is writing the media plan in one of their exercises in June. It's a very complicated scenario--somewhere in the Middle East when the international press corps riots in some country that has been invaded and we're making them go through it--out of that we are producing amendments to the book which is called JSP 101--Joint Service Publication--which is the staff officers manual which sets out all the factors you consider in making an operations order where media will be in it. So, even if you are in a battalion or a regiment, and receive a journalist, you must go through this process: Is he accredited, who is to look after him, how he is going to get his copy out, and have I got any controls on him? The second thing we are doing, today for is have an officer go through all of our contingency plans, these three that, as a package, will be written into all our contingency plans in the future. And what we will then have to do is consider the number of journalists that you can take with you to any particular theater of operations, depending upon the size of the force. Obviously, you can't have unrestricted press, but it is very interesting that the House of Commons Defense Committee criticized us for our failure to get our act together in the Falklands and said, next time you tell us and we'll accommodate them. So, you know at this moment we have relatives in the Falklands and we sent a representative press party to cover this. And, we reckoned the maximum number we could cope with is 15 because we can guarantee could be moved by helicopters from place to place--that was the limiting factor. So, we got off to everyone and said, that you've got so many, etc., and sat back and waited. The National Press couldn't get their act together and we have great fun with this because they haven't been able

to go public with it. First of all, because they told us to go through with this process and the moment we went through it they found they couldn't do it. Secondly, because we put the relatives first and the Press second. So, if they started saying, well--you know the relatives--do you think the relatives are less important and you are not? And so on. So, the first thing is you got to have a plan. And, the second lesson that we've learned is that you must have one person in charge. What we sent down to the Falklands, was an ad hoc group of five government information service civilians who are ex-journalists recruited into the government for the nation's service, who didn't know the commander, didn't know the commanding officers, didn't know military operations, and as a result were unable to help the journalists and they were unable to help their commanders. So, they were unpopular with both. And we got it right further down because of each of the two brigades the commander of the brigade--and we had five brigades--we sent the public relations officer or someone nominated to be the press officer. And, so it's all right further down but the damage was done--it was done before the 21st of May when we had people landing. But they still didn't have it coordinated with the Admiral; hence, poor old Sandy Rupert was sitting in his cabin making one statement one day and taking it back the next day. Just to send a group of civilians who weren't in uniform, untrained, unbriefed, not knowing the Press, not knowing the commanders, was pointless. So, we learned: always send a commander. Now there's some argument whether he should be a military man or a civilian. What we are saying and suggested was that he should be a military man because that cuts ice with the military who understand the military and you are going right down to brief some civil servant who comes along and will tend to tell him to push off. Whereas, if he's a military person he might listen. But, notwithstanding he must have a military

deputy as an advisor. But, that is something that is up for grabs. Now, the third thing is now going on from both those is that the journalist must be trained. We found that the people who went to the Falklands because it was such a hurry were a most amazing, ragtaggle, bobtail bunch. One of them arrived on a motorbike after just photographing the pregnant Princess of Wales, in the West Indies. None of them had any experience at all. They didn't know, they didn't appreciate these military imperatives that I mentioned at the start, or that they might be involved. Therefore, they've got to be briefed. And this is one of the reasons that I'm coming across to see General Lyle Barker because it's not just training the journalist, which we are going to do in a NATO setting, but it's also training the government information officers who are going to form your escort body, under the commander. So they know the operation imperatives. By sending a lot of people off, untrained, not only will they get in the way and they'll be get in your hair and end up in a shambles.

Interviewer:

It seems to me, we've never done that when we have an exercise and the Press comes; all they do is report the exercise. That's wrong; what they should do is actually play "news." They should write on what they saw and it comes back up the chain, implementing the procedures of vetting the news. Trains us and trains them.

Ramsbotham:

That's what we are going to do. We are doing the first file this year, exercise in September--they'll come through here, they'll be accredited, they'll go out, they'll be equipped in their normal nuclear, chemical, biological clothing for when they go to visit the exercise. We'll move them from different places so they don't spend 3 weeks in one place.

If there is a nuclear or chemical threat then they'll go into their nuclear clothing like everyone else.

Interviewer:

The press indicates they think they'll play?

Ramsbotham:

Yes, we had a meeting last October with a representative body of British editors and German editors and took them to visit an exercise there and discussed all this when the request for training to be able to do this came from them. We formed an editorial liaison committee on Fleet Street and sent out 3000 questionnaires to all branches of the media saying, "do you wish to take part? Would you wish some people trained?" They won't all answer because it's in the regional papers as well. But we got replies back of which people wish to take part and the results are quite encouraging. One left-wing MP who had a nasty air about him started off asking questions in the House of Commons and he has been told to stop it. Because the House of Commons can't complain that we're not looking after the journalists and then complain that we are looking out for them--they can't have it both ways. But, we're encouraged because it's bubbling up from below I think they realize that, unless they send people out onto the battlefields who are able to report, unless they know roughly what it is like, then they have nothing to report about, anyway.

Interviewer:

I want to put my own two cents into this. It's a great plan. Our own media would go along with you as long as there is a story in it. One point is, that without a draft we have lost across the board--editors on down--and senators on down--that expertise of expression with the military.

Ramsbotham:

We've lost this too with the National Service thing. I don't think losing the draft should be a factor in your considerations. We lost our National Service in 1960 and now there are very senior journalists who didn't do any military service whatsoever. And the fact that they didn't have a National Service background doesn't matter. And it's doubtful that the people you train will be available on that day but I don't think that matters. The principle is established that if we carry out these training sessions then we have put the onus on the editors to make certain that their people go through this and this encourages dialogue between us and editors which must be good.

Interviewer:

Does that mean that only trained journalists should be able to go when actual development occurs?

Ramsbotham:

No, but we would like to think we can train as many as possible. You see if this thing works--this year or next year--we have two exercises going on now--and our dialogue with the National College for the training of journalists there is no reason why you can't train all journalists in one day for a day with their colleagues, anyway. So--they know a bit about it. This is what we are working at so they should spend a day or two with the military and discuss that with us and their own tutors and write a paper on what they've seen. So they know what an officer looks like when they ring up a unit; it's as basic as that. You know, we did it in the war--they used to have a week's training at Clarebright with the Guards before they'd be allowed out of the United Kingdom. Now, the fourth lesson that we've learned is that you must take foreign journalists; you cannot afford to take just the domestic press. It was a tragic mistake and I

believe actually towards the end there were a number of people who were beginning to believe what was coming out Buenos Aires not because it was necessarily more accurate but because it was not as inaccurate and slanted as it had been. But, also particularly because Germans were hearing Germans and Americans were hearing Americans and there is no doubt you must have international government representation with whatever group you are taking. Whether it's an agency or not, I don't think it matters. I think one of the representatives or two would have paid dividends. Now the final lesson is censorship or control operations that you put into practice are not and never should be a public relations operation. Because censorship control is essentially a command function. Now we came to that conclusion for various reasons. Now if I can dart into NATO for a few minutes which takes one away really but brings me back and, as you know having operated in NATO, there is a very good NATO doctrine, but it has not very much teeth in it at the moment. So in the last Exercise WINTEX we tried to test it, especially on the business of censorship of operation and control. Needless to say it broke down. We've now been asked to make the presentation to the NATO Military Committee in June so that they can get down to discussing it, as well as the ministerial committee because they realize they've been going on, in blissful ignorance, assuming self-censorship would apply to the press. Now there are various factors, taking the British Corps Zone which is the one I know best, there are telephones in every house within 5 kilometers of the border, by law which you know, and I am sure it is down in the American zone as well. Secondly, censorship is forbidden by law in the FRG. What we might like to impose on our journalists we're not allowed to by federal law. Thirdly, there are something like 900 journalists living now in the corps area who are there by right. So, what are numbers; what do we mean by control? Well, we can't control



the outlet of communications, but what we can do is as the various alert measures go through we can apply certain physical restrictions to access of communications. The military can obviously prevent from seeing what is inside of a certain woods--or what defense position there, are by physically preventing people from going there. And as you get nearer the hostilities that is where your accreditation really begins to bite. Because we see you as an accredited journalist as someone who has got an NBC suit and got a gas mask and is trained and going to be escorted and, therefore, in the military vehicle he has some chance of getting to somewhere where he can see the news. Whereas, if he is not, he is not going to get there. Briefings--I don't reckon we can keep anyone out of briefings, until hostilities break out, even the chap from TASS where there is no reason. On the other hand, when hostilities break out, then you are in a position to restrict the briefings that you give to our accredited journalists and you don't even tell the others that the briefings have taken place. So, that source of information will dry up. There will still be people hunting stories and life won't be as easy as all that. The accredited ones will be in a better position to do so. And, therefore, we see the job of control as being that of the operational commanders laying down those parts of information which he does not want to give away for particularly operational reasons and making sure those command instructions are given down the chain so that his executives can exercise that effectively. But that is not a public relations function. The escort officers--yes--they may be in the PR chain but they are working out of command guidance and they know where they can and cannot go--because that's given to you by command. The restriction of TV teams with all the threat of direct satellite communication--how the hell are they going to get there--well, it's an operational function it is within the operational channel to make certain that people

realize which areas are not to be photographed. You again, come back to the escort, you can not just expect a public relations officer, maybe a civilian, to know what is in the commander's mind unless the commander lays it down and that goes back to the plan. In it the Commander has got to decide what he is going to control. Now, we in the Falklands were tied in by location of the Falklands, and by the chain of command. Stuff was released up there that could only come back through our auspices, except for use of naval communications signal MARISAT wide world. The broadcasting was done from there into the BBC then the BBC rebroadcast that into the BBC TV, radio, and ITV and the BBC world service and ourselves. Now, the people on the ground were not in a position to know what was happening anywhere else. The Commander, because he didn't have a PR chap in charge, wasn't able to instill a major policy decision of what or what was not going to be released. So that is why we had to have a second tier of control, if you like, of control back here. Everything went through the Ministry of Defense--both the written, which was easy because it came over our secure teleprinter link, and all the broadcast stuff which came into us and that was released when we were happy with it. We still think that there will probably always be a two-tier system--there must be. Because the operational commander and to quote an actual example, in the Falklands Five Brigade landed and the reporters saw the Gurkhas, for instance ashore, and there was a very good dispatch about the reactions of the Argentinian prisoners whose eyes started rolling back in their heads--and, the Gurkhas giggling and thumbing their Kukris at them--jolly good story: we couldn't let it go. We couldn't let it out because here the decision of the commander-in-chief was that we would not release the Five Brigade on shore because we wanted to leave the Argentinians still thinking that there was a possible second amphibious option. The people in the Falklands couldn't

see that because they could see Gurkas everywhere, and couldn't see why the story on the Gurkas couldn't be released--so they sent it back here and we put the block on here. As far as individual operations are concerned, down there, the commander may not know necessarily what the political reasons there are for withholding information. And, so that is why we think that there will always be two-tiers and I suppose those are the five lessons that we have from the Falklands. But, over and above that, and not strictly on the military side the one thing we learned as far as the government is concerned--and, I'll stop so you can ask questions--is that the government has got to get its act together. And, I don't if Colin Jennings mentioned this to you. We in the Ministry of Defense here were briefing American correspondents, we were briefing editors on occasion, we were briefing American correspondents, separately, we were briefing regional correspondents separately, and we were briefing NATO ones every now and then. Meanwhile, back on the ranch, the foreign office were briefing the diplomatic correspondents--totally differently; and, meanwhile, as well, Number Ten Downing Street's Prime Minister's Secretary was briefing the Parliamentary Lobby and, indeed, all the diplomatic parliamentary people from overseas, as well. And, we got into a mad situation. Really! Stuff would come out of the Buenos Aires and out of the US which would be refuted here--the Falklands would get annoyed because they were not being allowed to say things that were being picked up--and then broadcast here. Number Ten was then saying more than what we were saying. And, you've got to have some coordinator of information, particularly in time of tension or in war. There is a standing committee that should meet here in London--it didn't. It will, I hope in the future, because that's a lesson that's come out of this for government, not just for the military. I suppose the classic case was the question of what was known to the world as Black Cove it wasn't--it

was called FitzRoy, where Sir Galahad was bombed. Where we did not release the numbers and names of casualties, for obvious reasons the Argentinians put out that there was 700 dead and 900 wounded but we didn't want to disabuse that fact that because wrote off mentally for them an attack from the Southern flank. And, so we let it go. Now, the Foreign Office picked up a report through a Ham radio, from Goose Green in Bristol, that there were 200 dead being brought ashore at Ajax Bay that had been seen and the Foreign Office put that out, as a report, and we didn't deny that either. But, finally, Mrs Thatcher in Dusseldorf let out that only about 50 had been killed without tying it up with the Military Defense Foreign Office at all--so we then had to have a meeting here with everyone, going and saying to Mr. Notting, What the bloody hell is going on? And, he said, look--we'll tell you the figures when we need to and the only people who need to know of the moment and who have a right to know are the next of kin. They're being informed; nobody else needs to know, at the moment. So, wait until then. So we could have saved ourselves an awful lot of aggro, if it had been agreed by everybody that the line you were going to take on this was--and, now would all ministries please follow that line. And, I don't believe that in war, and the Falklands was war rather in that point of view that you can afford not to have a coordination with a government information policy.

Interviewer:

And the Standing Committee has that built-in capability?

Ramsbotham:

Yes!!

Interviewer:

Who is the head man?

Ramsbotham:

It's chaired by the Secretary of the Academy. He has the permanent secretaries of all the ministries involved. Because technically, in each ministry, it's the civil service, it's the permanent undersecretaries who are responsible for the information machine and that applies here. Now, that's quite enough banging off for me.

Interviewer:

It's very easy to sit there in our position and say we're going to restrict information that involves military operations, unit identification, troop movements, ships arriving, and leaving, and that sort of thing. And say, like we do with the Soviet Military Liaison Mission in Germany, "You can't go in that patch of woods because we don't want you to." That's one thing. But there's another thing. And on that, TV has the capability of really impacting. For example, if as the Sheffield went down there was a young man with an English camera on his back with a capability of hitting a satellite overhead, we could have sat here and watched those men as they came up through the companionways burning and dying--very dramatic--very dramatic and newsworthy.

Ramsbotham:

Yes, newsworthy.

Interviewer:

Now, to censor that would not be on military needs. You can only censor it based on content of tone or . . .

Ramsbotham:

Taste.

Interviewer:

Yes, taste or protection of next of kin. How do you see handling of TV from a judgmental point of view of the impact that it presents--the visual image that it presents.

Ramsbotham:

We talked obviously about the tone and the taste--quite a lot. Particularly on the Sir Galahad instance which I suppose is the one that stands out. Now, first of all we believe that the great British public is more conservative than we give it credit for and if you look at the opinion polls of certain things I'm interested in, seeing that in spite of all the furor in the press, that 46% have quite clearly favored having an armed police force and I suspect you know, that underneath it all, that war is not a very nice thing. It will probably take a bit more than we do, and we take it that we cannot stop every single outlet and those that get through will probably end up by giving a more balanced picture than if we suppressed it. We were under criticism in the Falklands because there were no bodies--there were no bodies anywhere. Because what you are having is 5 battalion attacks in three weeks--I said three weeks--but four took place at night and so it wasn't like that, you know. It wasn't a sort of Paschendale--however, we believe that there were two things that can operate in this and this is what we discussed with the media. First of all, it is our ability to control their access which is something that has got to be done on the spot between the crew and the commander and/or his representatives. There is no way it can be done any other way. Now, the second is the editorial self-censorship which the editor applies to releasing material which comes back to him. Now, the editors that we have discussed this with includes a very wide body--we had a long weekend at St. George-Windsor in December.

Reckon--that their patriotism is something which was taken into account as well. I mean, they've got to decide to a certain extent.

Interviewer:

Reasonable, honorable men? . . .

Ramsbotham:

Yes, and there's no member of the national press who willingly wants to undermine or be accused of undermining the national will when he's been asked not to, but that we said to them is all very well but what about the international press? I mean, the scandal about the Royal family doesn't appear in our British press but it appears in Stern or Paris Match. So the international press may well publish things which they've got hold of which we nationally may not wish to publish. That again is something which I think you've got to take on the chin when it comes--we don't believe it is practical or possible to stop every electronic news-gathering machine, camera team, long lens chap photographing from behind a car by opening the curtains in the back window--type of person, if that's what they are actually bent on doing.

Interviewer:

The danger here is not that which applies to wars of national survival but to wars of national convenience. Example, you are going to see it tonight around 9 o'clock--on your own TV--a documentary on the Vietnam War. Last night as I watched the previews I saw what I perceive as the typical example of the danger presented by the media as it impacts on national will. In this scene, there's a big fire fight was going on in Hue--this was one of our big battles during the Tet offensive--soldiers are lined up behind the wall and they're having a pretty good fire fight and everyone was involved--and this guy was firing his M-16 and drops down to reload and the reporter sticks a mike in his face and asks, "Have you lost any friends lately?" And this

guy says, "Yes, I lost one yesterday," and then he says, "this whole thing stinks." He turns around and gets up and goes back to firing. The image that's left in the mind is a very subtle one. I was sitting there saying, this is terrible--terrible. It was not the fact that this trooper was commenting on the horror of war--which stinks, but that the reporter was politicizing what was an apolitical statement. I fought in war and the closer you get to it, the worse it is. But I didn't go through a continual analysis of whether the national policy was correct or not.

Ramsbotham:

No.

Interviewer:

That is the danger of TV. I would appreciate your point of view. It seems to me that TV is an area where we must have fairly tight controls. What do you think?

Ramsbotham:

That's very interesting. We have formed this thing called the Censorship Study Group and I'm sure you've been told it's meeting at the moment under the chairmanship of a very distinguished general with a very wide number of media involved. They meet purely because we feel it is such an important issue and that we've got to tackle it head on and come up with something that is practical, instead of theoretical. I am very eager to see what they come up with. When they ask me this question I shall answer when I see them on Thursday or Friday in the same sort of way I've been talking to you. I know it would have been nice to close the battlefields. We were able to close it in the Falklands where we only had 3 camera teams and they couldn't be in all places at once--then the film was taken by ship from the Falklands to Ascension because the Falklands are just entering the 18th Century and there was no way of transmitting it, unless we had tipped



an American satellite on it axis, which they wouldn't have allowed us to do, in order get the right beam then we would have had a rather starchy black and white picture--and that's all.

Interviewer:

To us, that's one of the unanswered questions. How do we handle that sort of violence that is insidious in its impact.

Ramsbotham:

Break for refreshments.

Winter:

Would you explain the actions the British would take if a conflict occurred in Belize as far as handling media control?

Ramsbotham:

The problem with that of course is that we have an Ambassador there and we are there politically, instead of militarily, Belize is a funny case. He is in charge of the whole Press operation, as far as the British are concerned in Belize. But what we would do as far as the British are concerned would be to send out somebody in charge. If Belize were reinforced, obviously whoever went out would be of the appropriate rank and status as commander of the force, someone not less than a full colonel in rank. We would think that if it were a Major General sent out with reinforcements the person in charge of the press would someone not less than a full colonel in rank. It might even be a brigadier because that would give him the status over the commanding officers. However, if it's going now the sort of thing we would send is a left tenant general and we would send reinforcements and an escort officer so they could look after the accepted number of journalists who have arrived. The big problem in Belize of course is actual communications. I mean how the hell are those press going to get around! There are not many roads. They'd have to commandeer

vehicles. And there is also a communications problem. And, so what we would do would be to send out PR representatives to go sit with the communication centers so they could at least help them or could make something as close to PR traffic on the communications thing in hopes that would help the people there. But that's purely speculation. If you define the principles that I've gone through and that's about the way we worked out the communications abroad and there's another case in point, you see. So, let's take somebody south of Spain who might want to take a swipe at and grab Gibraltar--what the hell are we going to do about that. I don't think, actually, we can press our luck out here. We have to have someone there who can at least assist the Foreign Office whose immediate problem it is, rather than purely a military one. A very grey area I can tell you; a very scary one in Gibraltar. You know air defense is another area which interests us, too, in the United Kingdom because and it's just not because of the whole nuclear debate which is going on at the moment but when you count down the Home Defense--the UK is organized into various regions and each has an embryo regional government--now, they have a regional information officer but the security of that area is linked to a British district which is military and, also police. So, what we do is form triumvirates on the information handling side of the regional, which is civilian, the military, and the police, and they have a small operations center but they also have escort officers in the same they mention accreditation and handling so if journalists do arrive they can brief then hopefully they can take some of them around. But again, the principle commander, the regional commander, can help by saying what he does not want to be published he's got some chance of controlling access to some places--pretty unlikely, but at least there's a system there that could be applied if necessary. But, he's linked straight up with central government; that where I go back to

that government is central control of information and that is absolutely the mirror of how it happens in Germany--the territorial commands of the Federal Republic of Germany is the triumvirate of the region of the land government or whatever, of the military and the police and that's where we took it from.

Interviewer:

Do you think the Max Hastings's phenomena is good or bad? Would you want to encourage the relationships within the media he has or would you want to not?

Ramsbotham:

I'm in a slightly privileged position because I was actually responsible for sending Max Hastings out there and I sent a minder with him and I sent a photographer, an Army photographer. . . .

Interviewer:

Did he get a military minder as opposed to a civilian? . . .

Ramsbotham:

He had a civilian. We were only allowed to send civilians and I sent him with a chap called Martin Helm who, eventually, became the minder for Jeremy Moore. He's the only Army minder we sent out of the five I mentioned. Max Hastings was the only war correspondent of the whole bloody lot, frankly--and, he's an old personal friend from Northern Ireland days and I came in here one Monday morning, sitting in that chair over there, saying, when the hell am I going? That's a good point, I think.

Interviewer:

I got that distinct impression, too, that he was the only one who knew what was going on--all the rest of them were amateurs.

Ramsbotham:

Precisely.

Interviewer:

And that makes a valid point that if you can get people to identify with the units with the Army or whatever through training or association you get better treatment.

Ramsbotham:

I think that's right. We were going to discuss this with a number of journalists as a case in point of various people who set up very, very close relationships. I suppose the classic case is that of Robert Fox of the BBC who got terribly close to H. Jones and then when he switched over to 3 Para he developed a very close relationship with one of the company commanders called Martin Osborne who was in fact an ex-journalist and he found that by developing that relationship and identifying with a unit--and, this was going back to Northern Ireland, where people got to know people, that's where they were able to do it--the interesting thing is from a journalist's point of view that, of course, that going with one unit denies our freedom of action because they all felt they wanted to report the whole war. Well, they couldn't; they couldn't see that a pool system allowed the public to have full reports but this is one particular instance where their contribution is better because it is closer with a particular unit than it might be if they tried to dart across a given overview which they are incapable of doing.

Interviewer:

Because Hastings did that--

Ramsbotham:

Hastings is a very crafty chap because what he did he knew that the key thing in all this was communications and he'd also been in sufficient operational situations to know a number of people and to ask them a few questions, and get a few answers and whack it into a dispatch and roll off

and communicate it. So, he stopped by helicopter communication centers because he knew the form--others took much longer to assess a situation and then prepare a dispatch and by that time Max Hastings would have done it and that's why when we wanted to get the story of the SAS told because the public thought the Marines had done Pebble Island where we had that helicopter crash and the 18 SAS were lost we decided to get the proper story out so that for the purpose of the relatives who must have thought that their husbands had gone out for no purpose at all. And, the only person who was capable of writing that story was Max Hastings. So, we had Max attached to the SAS and he went off with them, heard what they got to say and told the story and sent it back and it was quite interesting because we did a trial of the D-Notice system because it was mentioned in the House of Commons Defense Committee Report. We sent that dispatch back by two ways; one, we sent it back by the SAS means so that the families could have it even if it got cut by the censor and then we sent it back through the other way through the censorship system to see what happened with reports about the SAS with their operations and, of course, they were referred to us and delivered. . . .

Interviewer:

The way that was referred to in the popular literature was as an aberration. That the way it was, the SAS wanted publicity so bad that even though it was not to go through the censorship it came through. . . .

Ramsbotham:

It came through both and the copy--and I still have a copy here--but the copy that came through the press through a hidden camera because that's how it was transmitted (fumbling through safe for copy). What happened was that Max sent the second one through the SAS communications right on the end of the last day to make certain that he got the story of the surrender

out and the fact that he was the first into the Falklands he said to the CO I've bloody well got to get this out because Jerry Moore has imposed a blackout so the SAS man said, help yourself so he put that back SAS thing. That's what the fuss is all about because he was using SAS reserved for his own use rather than for our use because the other one was very definitely ours and our request. That, perhaps in part, answers your question about control of the individual who was photographing with a TV camera out the back window of a motor car and bringing up to a satellite--he's only getting a very small part of the overall picture and I don't know what you're feeling if you're here at the time but if that small part is only a small part that over a period of time is going to be discounted but it's the guy with the overview that's going to be in the end putting out the story which is accepted by the majority of the people. And the bloke with the overview must be the accredited person because he's the only one who can get around sufficiently to be able to get it--is that fair?

Interviewer:

At first, when we first broached this thing the media said I'll come in from the other side and we said, fine--go do that but when you do that after awhile the novelty will wear off and people will wonder which side you are on and the other side's control will be even more stiff and you're going to find yourself being used.

Ramsbotham:

This is why I say, TV is the least effective for war reporting because it is one picture at one time. Of course, the danger is that the TV commentator then generalizes on his particular picture which is the worst element of it all.

Interviewer:

But he films the operation with an honest eye. Then he makes a judgmental statement at the end, "that this foolishness has been going on for six months," or some such comment. He has shown the truth but he has painted it his color.

Ramsbotham:

That's right and he's based it on what he saw rather than an interview.

Winter:

This is the fear our classmates have had and I refer to a study which was done last year that shows the majority of students were against any media at all in the field. They were really against TV media because they would take that isolated shot and blow it up as the whole.

Ramsbotham:

In a rather elegant remark that goes with that, this was the first war that was ever fought by the media and particularly on the TV screen. There is no acceptable parallel in the US but I believe that the acceptability of Northern Ireland where some pretty terrific things have happened and very quickly is because of what we call our regional press--which is our local boy who types a story by a very local homespun reporter visiting his own regiment, and reporting all the people who live in that village or town in a way which is both credible because the chap is too unsubtle to do more than that but also links exactly to the reports given to him either by parents or friends by people when they themselves come back and, therefore, because they have seen it. They know it's credible. And, I believe, that is why Northern Ireland is acceptable not by the excesses by the National press and particularly TV which tries to interpret rather than report.

End Of Interview

INTERVIEW  
WITH  
MR. PETER JENNINGS  
ABC NEWS  
LONDON, 12 APRIL 1983

Interviewer:

Back in January when you were on the "Night Line" program, it was very difficult to keep on the issue, I think, because of the forum that you used. It was sort of a public catharsis and some woman attacked you which, I think, is probably an indicator of why we are here too. She attacked you to a great round of applause about how everything from inflation to weather could be attributed to the media. But that wasn't the issue. The question was censorship in time of conflict or war. The ending statement was that ABC or Ted Koppel sees that as not only an alternative but a probable alternative, and it's something we could work with in our business.

Jennings:

Live with censorship?

Interviewer:

Something that they saw as not being necessarily evil, in other words. Not a stand-up, up front under no circumstances, as we heard it. He didn't want any violation of the 1st Amendment, no rules. I want to be free, trust me, that's the other side of it. This presented another dimension that we had not heard anyone else in the media. . . .

Jennings:

I'm not altogether sure I understand you. You're saying that there is an argument for less than total freedom of reporting in a conflict.



Interviewer:

I thought that the was point of view that he made at the end, and that was reinforced in a way--this is very difficult to say without using the wrong words, because the wrong word creates so many images.

Jennings:

I'm not an image conscience person.

Interviewer:

When we went to New York in October, we visited you at your offices in New York--Siegenthaler, Murphy and the new fellow who's the Pentagon correspondent. That's when I first sensed that something was about on the discussion of censorship, and control of the media in time of conflict or war.

Jennings:

Well, let's start with a couple of basic premises. I think journalists, responsible or otherwise, probably more so the otherwise, are opposed to censorship as a matter of principle and are strong supporters of the 1st Amendment. That brings with it a whole bag of problems about responsible reporters and a lack of responsible reporters because it raises the whole question or issue of national survival. It raises the issue of peoples' lives. So, I start always with the premise that I'm opposed unilaterally to censorship whether it be political, military or otherwise. That is not to suggest that I don't recognize. . . . I want to have the clearest delineation between recognizing a perceived need for censorship and the automatic imposition of it. Let's use the Falklands as one case. When censorship was imposed by MOD here in order, in their view, to protect the sentiments or sympathies or sensibilities of the families who had sons involved in the attack on the Shetland, for example, they merely announced the attack on the Shetland thereby leaving all those families worried.

That was a misapplication of censorship. If you are involved in an operation in which the nation's security is deemed to be at stake, I find it not the slightest bit surprising that censorship is imposed, nor do I find it surprising that military commanders--or the supreme commander, in the case of the recent so-called Libyan attack against the Sudan--would go to the press and say, "We ask you not to publish in the interests of security." If, in the judgement of the press, that becomes an abused tactic then I would suggest that it is the press's right to make it's own independent judgement about national security. During the Libyan so-called attempt--and I emphasized so-called--to overthrow the government of the Sudan, I still question whether the US got it right. I've been that route with the administration before on the Khadafi question. I think Khadafi is a bug-a-boo for the administration. Therefore, an attempt to impose censorship on me in the question of an operation involving Khadafi would bring, for me, a much greater dose of skepticism and cynicism, and much less willingness to accept the administration's desire for censorship than if I were in the middle of an operation somewhere on the line or in a battlefield situation where I thought civilians were going to be killed or peoples' lives were going to be put at stake. You see, if we're not fighting. . . . When you talk about the national good or national survival, it's very difficult because so little that we do today involving war really has to do with the national survival. If the Marines in Beirut were having constant confrontations with the Israelis, as we've had recently, and we were told that we couldn't report the elements of those confrontations, the imposition of censorship in that instance would be something I would oppose very much.

Interviewer:

How would you oppose it though? Would you just disregard and go ahead and print the story?

Jennings:

No, I was speaking theoretically. I am one of those reporters who, if I am told that if I accept the story from anybody whether it be a military commander in the field or a government agency that it will be off the record, I play by those rules. If I am told ahead of time, in an instance like that, that my copy would be censored, I would have two choices: either accept the censorship, or simply refuse to accept the story and try to get it another way. The competitive instincts of the networks, I think, would probably want you to get as much as you could; my own personal instinct would be to walk away from the story.

Interviewer:

While we're stopped here for a minute, let me take you back over something because I think it's critical. It's not unusual. We've seen it a couple or three places. If the national security is involved, then there's no question. If they're at our borders or in Western Europe heading toward the North Sea, then there's no question. The problem is, that's the most dangerous course of action that's available to enemies of ours, but probably the least likely to occur. If it does occur, then we've got to get a whole new set of rules. That makes the job very easy for all of us in those circumstances. The difficulty lies in the peripheral business. We don't all subscribe to the theory that it's a grand plan; we don't all subscribe to the monolith concept of communism and yet, those who do--and they all have just as good a heart as the rest of us--feel that therein our national security does lie in stake. It's the "death of a thousand bites." So that's a very dangerous argument, I think, to use because that puts it in the hands of the judges. I don't want to be judging the media on matters of taste, on matters of color, and that sort of thing. I want to do it operationally.

Jennings:

The imposing hand, if you will, of censorship which may be at the Joint Chiefs' level, is going to be imposed given the Joint Chiefs set of considerations anyway, not ours.

Interviewer:

We're being trained now to look at the world along the periphery, as opposed to an assault in Western Europe: I don't want to get into the argument of who's the judge and that sort of thing, but it is a very difficult aspect of it, and that's one of the problems we're faced with. If the government says it's so, that doesn't make it so, but it's the government saying it's so, and I just have a hard time with someone setting himself up and saying, "Ah yes, but this really is in our national interest," and that's the part that's hard. And therefore, I think we need to steer totally clear of the issue of censorship per se because of just that problem which we get in to.

Jennings:

But you will always have people like that. Let's say that the guy who's imposing the censorship happens to come from the extreme right of the political spectrum, you're always going to find people in the news establishment who will say. "That's not true," and attempt to break those rules of censorship. But when it comes down to actually deciding how the informational aspect of the war is going to be conducted, by and large, it's 90% you and 10% us. You have basic transport, you have basic access in every way, shape and form. The reason you always get into these analyses it seems to me, afterwards is because then you go back and look. For example, during the first ten days of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, reporters were not allowed to go up with Israeli troops, and therefore for the first time in an Israeli-Arab conflict, there was freedom of movement and no

censorship on the other side and the war began to be reported from the side of Israel's perceived enemies. The Israelis took an incredible knock. In that case it was during, because it was a fairly long protracted thing. In the Falklands, because it was so containerized, it's only been after the fact. This was also the great patriotic war for reasons I don't fully understand. When it's happening, you're the guys with the hand on the spigot.

Interviewer:

You also were featured in a wrapup on Lebanon, the walk back through, and you said sort of the same thing. I like what you said because that's the way I'd like to view it too. There were irresponsible elements.

Jennings:

There always are. "Irresponsible" perhaps is only one word. "Untrained" is another.

Interviewer:

That's an item we definitely identified, and the loss of the draft doesn't help us at all in this aspect. We have untrained congressmen too. I think we could offer something that would allow a reporter, as in journalism schools, the opportunity to get some training--coming out and playing with us a little bit and seeing what it's like. The fellows that went into the Falklands. . . . There were bitter complaints about who these guys were. They sent these rabble down there.

Jennings:

Are we talking about censorship or are we talking about how you improve the relationship between . . . ?

Interviewer:

It's muddy. These are our conclusions to date: censorship, per se. in the true classic sense is probably non-operable. It isn't gonna work.

There are too many ways around it. Who imposes it? Who does it? What are your standards? What do you base it on? It's simple if I talk about such things as operations, kick-off times, unit identification, ship movements, ammunition shortages. Those things are simple. I can handle that, and you can handle that. We can reach an agreement probably this afternoon that 9 out of 10 journalists will agree with. That's not the problem. The problem is the overlap, the spillover into the psychological and political implications of what you report that I'm doing. It's not in the releasing of the ship's names as to who was sunk and who was not sunk. There were sound military reasons, that were soon overcome by time, and the only reason it was then held back was for political reasons. Now is that justifiable ground for me as a government to censor or control? That gets a little more difficult.

Jennings:

I haven't explored this in my own mind yet, but I think that what is happening here is the difference between us Americans and them. It is deemed to be justifiable, it seems to me, depending upon the will--to use your earlier--phase of your population. As I said, this was the great patriotic war, the last flexing of the imperial muscle. I was stunned here, for someone who's lived here five years, to see the rampant nationalism involved in this war, to see the overwhelming anti-Argentinian feeling. I have a good friend here who is the number two in the Argentinian Embassy. The most incredibly civilized man I know in town. He just put his head under the ground, and didn't know what to do except call reporters everyday and ask did we know anything he didn't know? Because he didn't know anything. The war was sort of nationally popular. Even the Labor Party, which is very unilateral as you know, was put into such a political box that it was difficult to oppose the war. The Israelis censored us on

the satellite for X period of time, a period during the Lebanese invasion, we overput "censored" on the television screen every night. Given our political culture, with our sociological state of mind at home, that did the Israelis a good deal more harm. And yet all of them will tell you that events are always censored in Israel, but you cannot report military affairs all the time, day in and day out for years to the military censor. So the imposition of censorship worked sociologically and politically against the government. Here it worked the opposite way, people by and large accepted censorship and when Peter Snow stood up and questioned the efficacy of--I forget exactly what the incident was--government-imposed censorship at one point, I mean God, there were letters to the Times, and people standing in the House of Commons calling him a traitor.

Interviewer:

And his colleagues accused him not of reporting the truth, but of reporting the war. Part of that's what I mean, part of it is that aspect. It seems extremely difficult, because of those other considerations, for classic censorship to be overlaid on almost any situation, other than for simple reasons. And on the other hand, this great gulf exists. I can allow print guys because they have to cogitate, but I can't allow electronic media. That's the second thing. I'm not advocating greater relations, but I think relations are part of the same problem from an American point of view. As we get further into this thing, the one and the other are definitely intertwined. Is this cry for control of the media, which is a probable event, or at least a very strong try, coming about because of this gulf that exists between the media and the military, the media and the institution, the media and the government, whatever you want to call it?

Jennings:

Well, I think it's partly that. It's also, now that you bring it up, partly the television. I remember, in 1965, General Westmoreland sitting in a garden with me in Saigon, at that point not viciously complaining, but bemoaning the fact, that the television camera in the field only saw that, and that is a significant dilemma and not just having to do with war, but having to do with all things that television covers in life. The scope of a camera, the camera's lens, is limited. If the cameraman is pointed in one direction when a significant event is occurring behind him, television can get it wrong. I think this is particularly true with a medium which is so visually oriented. I remember, on one of these two programs, when the spokesman from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, said that the trouble with television is it just shows fly-ridden bodies, and that is not war. And my response to him is, "Well indeed, that is very much a part of war." But I accept his thesis that that is not the only part of it. So it's a real problem. If you say, going on an operation, that I'll take the print guys because they've got to cogitate and because they look in this direction but television might look in that direction, people like myself in television, will scream and yell and say, "Look it's not 1984." The editor from the Washington Post, spoke about censorship as if the television camera had never been invented. But the television camera has been part of our lives for 30 years and is now the dominant part of our lives. So you get people like me in television screaming and yelling, and yet a small part of me will say, "I understand your problem." There are occasions when the television camera, for whatever reasons, is pointed in the wrong direction, the cameraman doesn't know what he is doing, or the director or the correspondent wants something other than what you want him to point his camera at.



Interviewer:

And the visual impact?

Jennings:

Well, I must confess that I recognize the power of television, and it concerns me at times. I guess it concerns me depending on what the story is. Sometimes I find the audience responding to stories, visual stories, which I'm not at all unduly distressed with. And there's the whole Vietnam argument--made as you know by any number of your colleagues in the military and in certain political segments in the country--which is that the presence of television undermined the American military effort in Vietnam.

Interviewer:

"Lost the war," is the phrase that is used more frequently.

Jennings:

Conversely, I wonder if the public--and again I haven't got an answer to this--I wonder whether or not, after all, the public is not more sophisticated over what it sees and what it knows that it isn't seeing on television than we think, or that it is not inured--and this was television's dilemma--in that they saw so much violence in Vietnam, that we can't, in a sense, use it as a hook.

Interviewer:

I feel that public opinion, public will, is fragile. As a servant, I get upset when I see ideals beat around. That may explain the feeling we, military, have about the media and its potential for diverting the national will away from things we perceive as being in our national interest.

Jennings:

I think that's very possible. What I think you seem to be striving for is communion of national will. I'm not sure there is, which doesn't make any more right than you. But, in a conflict situation, it gives you

an edge. Again, I think we have to use real examples. Let's stay off Vietnam for a moment. We've all beaten that one to death. Let's take the present introduction of, what are now, 1,200 Marines into Lebanon. Now I lived in Lebanon for five years, so I saw the Israeli's coming. It was only a matter of time. I see enormous opportunities for America to assert its influence in the Middle East via the Lebanese theater, if you will. It gives us a newfound influence on Syria. It enables us to stand back and grab a little more will from Israel. It enables us to mollify a situation in which the Christians are running amuck and the Muslims are getting left out in the cold. When the Marines first came to join the Multi-National Force, they got off the ship on a dead, calm gorgeous Beirut day. The Commander had not a whit of brains about public relations, and they came off on a beautiful sunny day screaming while the French stood around and looked on him with disdain. None of which, I might add, was reported. I'm all for the infusion of an American military presence in Lebanon. So I personally get very angry when I hear the politicians up on the Hill saying, "Look we're going to send them there, but I want you to guarantee, before they go, that they're not going to be hurt." And then I was appalled, and thought it was very bad for our "national interest," in your phrase, that they were pulled out early. In some ways, I think the withdrawal of them early was one of the contributing factors to Sabra and Shatila where the American national interest suffered a devastating blow.

Jennings:

It's very magical to guys who never had anything to do with it. There is nothing a reporter likes more, the first time out, than to see soldiers do their stuff. There has been a terrific show, here, on the paratroopers, the paratroop regiment. It's been on for four hours. It's absolutely fascinating. But I think a lot of reporters tend to forget that

you represent on the ground, whether it's a small operation like Beirut or an operation like Vietnam, a political instrument, that you are an instrument of national policy. So I think it's all very well to train reporters to understand what weapons, how you disperse weapons, and how troops operate so that they don't make absolute fools of themselves in reporting the military dimension. I think reporters have a tendency--I think this is an overstatement--to romanticize that, particularly if they are on the offensive side. They tend to be terrified of it and, therefore, tends to report it in a different way if they're on the receiving end; but they don't report enough of the sort of political context in which military action is taking place.

I've been thinking about it since you said it. I think Koppel was saying that the military, in a situation like the Lebanese invasion, can take . . . or that the military concept which was the Israeli one could take such a hammering politically, that there would just be full blown censorship.

Interviewer:

But it seems supportive of that position too, not just an observation. Can he do that from his position as a commentator, or is he doing this as an ABC. . . ?

Jennings:

No, he's just saying what Ted says. We don't have, to the best of my knowledge, a collective editorial point of view about what should be done or what shouldn't. I think, collectively, the corporate point of view wouldn't be opposed to censorship.

"Opposed to censorship" is different from what I think Ted said. He believed that full-blown battlefield censorship was coming. Other governments have been doing it for years.

Interviewer:

And you work with it and around it. I can't contextualize that.  
We're not like these people.

Jennings:

I don't think full-blown military censorship would ever be acceptable in the US.

Interviewer:

Let's go into El Salvador. Let's say that is in our national interest. The Congress is convinced that it's in our national interest. How do you see that being played?

Jennings:

Let me put you back in the Middle East. That's easier and it has a larger scope.

Interviewer:

The Soviets are in Afghanistan. Khomeini dies. Soviets come across the border, for what purpose we're not sure, but it looks like they're going for a gulf port, going for oil Europe lives on that oil. Japan lives on that oil. Doesn't mean a damn to us, but it's in our national interest. Hard to sell at home unless you're an East-West guy and not a North-South guy. We employ the 82nd Airborne goes in, and the 24th Infantry Division steams over there, and we make a little cluster down there in the South. And here come the Soviets moving towards us. We've got a period of tension which will come to actual hostilities. How do we play that from your perspective? What would be acceptable and unacceptable media control?

Jennings:

Let me first of all, tell you how a reporter or news executive would first begin to think. He would want to know how fast he could get a

reporter and a camera team from London to, let's say, eastern Turkey if that's where the 82D left from, or to Oman.

Interviewer:

We're steaming, one half is coming by ship, so you've got some time you could do that. . . .

Jennings:

First thing we would want to do is to have crews with you. Then, in a sense, you would have to present us with a set of rules. What would you say? You'd say, "Fine, we will take you with us but you can't report anything, or what you report will pass through military censors."

Interviewer:

I can give you, if you'd rather play it the other way, a set of circumstances and have you bounce those around.

Jennings:

Okay.

Interviewer:

We'll accredit you first. This is before the war starts. This is the tension period. We're not at war. We don't even know if Iran is going to accept us or not. It may not. (We may have to destroy Iran to save it.) So, we'll start accreditation. But that doesn't limit you from going any place you damn well please, yet, cause there's no war. We would like to parcel this thing out, and get as many of you as we can depending on the space that is available. That's extremely limited, particularly in the air flow.

Jennings:

We ask for 25 people and you give us three spaces.

Interviewer:

We try to give you a cross between regional press, local press and major networks. We would probably give emphasis, at first to print and electronic both by air and by water. I think we would try to establish some sort of liaison effort so that we could control your movements. We'd make access available. All that's pretty straightforward. Nothing new, nothing different.

Jennings:

Except that both imply already--and I don't debate it for a second--a measure of control.

Interviewer:

That's true, but there are going to be other newsmen who get there by their own hook. You can come into Iraq. You can come into Saudia Arabia, wherever, on your own hook. You're going to be loose in the country. And Iran has not said one thing or another. Whether they let you in or not is their business. The second thing is what to about your copy. How do we communicate your copy, how do you transmit your stuff? Do you use our satellite, or do you have to get off somewhere and get one of your own?

Jennings:

Again, if your talking about the two groups, first of all they are the ones who are in almost every instance under your control. You provided transportation and access, from your point of view, and they, let's just say for a moment like on board Hermes, would be dependent upon transmission facilities provided by the military. There is a third instance, where we get out our little book as to where you can satellite from. A year or so down the road from now we may be carrying our own transmitting facilities with us. So we'd want to have a guy in Turkey, we'd want to have a guy in

Bahrain, and we'd have people all over the bloody region trying to establish satellite points. We'd be overpaying taxi drivers and camel drivers. . . .

Interviewer:

I think because of the difficulties, that we would try to get, back in the States, some sort of coalition that cuts across the disciplines--an editorial board, senior people--and we would bring them together and attempt to form almost a "kitchen cabinet" type of relationship. So you understand "This is what's going on; This is what we're doing; we'd just as soon you didn't talk about this aspect of it; and that sort of thing."

Jennings:

That's where your choke point is. We could spend \$100,000 chartering a freighter as we tried to do in Argentina when they invaded the Falklands and pay those vast fees in insurance. We'd have our guys coming out in rowboats with videotapes. This has all taken a week or ten days, We'd finally get it back, and we'd satellite it to New York, or to London and then to New York, and your "kitchen cabinet" meanwhile has been working on the network execution and it would be at that point where the decision would be made to transmit. So we're not talking about the gathering of news so much as the transmission.

Interviewer:

At the forward edge, wherever it is, we will attempt, through the use of access, to limit what we want you to see or not see. There will be some places we don't want you to go for one reason or another. We may not want you to know that we have nuclear weapons over there, and that's for good reason. So there would be areas that are just exclusion zones. We would prohibit you from going there and would not provide transportation

there. What about the copy itself? I think all we can say at this stage is that we are going to appeal to your best interests.

Jennings:

That's exactly right.

Interviewer:

But one of the ways I'm going to assure your best interests are at heart is who I let go in the first place.

Jennings:

I think if you go to a network, which is as proud in institution in its own right, as you are in your own right, and say, "We'll take Jennings or Koppel, but we won't take Smith or Brown. . . ." You have to grant access to whomever the network designates.

Interviewer:

Or I say, "Give me two; we only have two spaces."

Jennings:

That's right. But that will work itself out. It seems to me your bottom line is not what we transmit from the scene to New York, but what we finally put on the air. And at the present time, the only way I can see that working to your advantage is by appealing to the, what you would call, sense of responsibility or sense of national interest of the networks or the newspapers. They would have to be convinced and play a similar game with you as you were playing with them.

Interviewer:

Phase two. Hostilities begin. We're at war. That's a different story.

Jennings:

Absolutely.



Interviewer:

Now we'll vet, as they did, your copy. Hopefully in the same sense they said they did, accuracy being paramount. And maybe even from a voluntary point as they did, except that we have no real lever in terms of national security. A censor has got to be accessible, he's got to be knowledgeable. I can't have some civil servant looking at your copy concerning something he's never participated in. It's got to be someone like me who understands the language and says, "You're absolutely right." It's come clear to us that there has to be an overviewer at the other end who has a bigger picture and who can look at things and say, "We can't do that." An example given to us was the Gurka's. In the Falklands, when the Gurka's went ashore, there was some really great copy. From the high command point of view, they wanted the Argentinians to continue to worry about a flank attack from the other side of the islands, and so they wouldn't release it. The fellows in the Falklands said, "My God, why not?" Even the local commander said it could be released. So there needs to be a "big picture" fellow and a "little picture" fellow. But the problem is the "big picture" fellow tends to be a politician. So again, the way I would like to approach that is through a combined group--you put up 5 guys and I'll put up 5 guys, and they will be our policy based on our clearance board, here in the States, that vets if you will or acts as the blue pencil boys. But it's your people and our people, and our people are advisors from the technical standpoint.

Interviewer:

It sounds ideal as you're presenting it, because it is imposing on the military-political overseer, as you describe him, to show cause to the blue ribbon panel of people deemed to be responsible, must show cause why holding that news, or forbidding it to be broadcast or printed is in the national

interest. What happened here during the Falklands, though there were occasionally outbursts of press indignation at the senior editor level, was that there was no onus on the military-political overseers at home to show cause acceptable to the press establishment. I used to go down to ITN occasionally and listen to the guys come in on the horn from Hermes and Invincible, or whatever communications ship they were using at the time. And you'd occasionally hear Hanrahan or Nicholson say, "X is happening, but I can't say that," and the guys on the home desk would respect it.

Interviewer:

It was still voluntary from what I understand. Tonight at 9:00 p.m. is the antithesis of what occurred in the Falklands. I just saw the ads on BBC-4 last night. Here's a wall in Vietnam with a bunch of young Marines behind the wall and a hell of a fire fight going on. Bullets are coming in. They got their rifles over the wall, but they're not looking. A marine is reloading his rifle, and this reporter sticks a mike right in his face and says, "Have you lost any friends today?" The kid looked at him and said, "... well no, but I lost a couple the other day." His last line is, "This whole thing stinks." And then he went back to firing over the wall.

The danger is just that little bit. The impact of this picture. I was out there, and I think the whole thing stank too. But not from a political point of view. That didn't have anything to do with it.

That type of thing is what we feel is at the root cause of our anxiety about the media.

Jennings:

It seems to me like a dumb question. I don't ask these kind of questions, like "How do you feel?" It's the worst type of question a reporter can ask. The trouble is that these kind sometimes produce copy.

It's interesting to see them advertising in that context when in fact it's going to be a twelve part series in which the French, the British and the Americans are all involved.

Interviewer:

There's three things on that advertisement. First one is that unfortunate young girl who got caught in the napalm; the second thing is an old Vietnamese woman who says, "I have never seen the Viet Cong burn a village, but everytime the Americans come through they set fire to the village." And then this other thing. And I just sat back and said, "Holy Cow."

Jennings:

You see especially the French and British; they hate us.

Interviewer:

My point was to take that as combat news reporting and to go into our scenario here. Sounds awfully ideal I think you said, and I think it is ideal. Is it workable; is it realistic?

Jennings:

This is going to sound very simplistic. Anytime where you have a responsible military and responsible press talking more closely about the military and political aims of an operation, the better the chances are you're going to get responsible coverage. If there is always a truly adversarial relationship which some journalists as you know advocate, then I think the chances for understanding are just diminished. As simple as it is, that's true. To give you an example, if you wanted to go to Beirut from Israel during the invasion which I did a couple of times, you could not travel from Northern Israel to that area of Beirut without a military escort. Now I was opposed to that in principle for two reasons. One, in principle I do not like being escorted by a soldier in a country in which I lived for 5 years and knew better than him. And I didn't like being told

that I had to travel with a member of the military establishment who had specifically been assigned, rather than say having a civilian or a group of my choice. But I invariably found that over that long dry 4 1/2 hours from Northern Israel to Beirut I learned something from him and he learned something from me.

Interviewer:

Everybody I know who has ever served on a UN peace mission has gone down there and come back a different believer.

Jennings:

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith did a survey during the Israeli invasion and they were trying to get at, I think, television. They were going to try to expose us and make us nervous because there had been a lot of problems. They came to present their results to ABC management and somebody said, "Well how did we do?" ABC turned out to be fair and Jennings was the fairest reporter in the world. And one of my management guys said, "What are you trying to do, ruin his reputation?" Now the advantage I had in that war was to travel back and forth to both sides. I would drive from Damascus to Beirut if things were quiet I would get in the car and drive it to Damascus, fly to London and fly back to Tel Aviv. Now that's an unusual situation in which you can cover both sides of the war. But I think it speaks to your point, which is that we must each clearly understand the other's mission rather than saying, "I'll get from you what I can,"--in your case, coverage which is deemed sympathetic to your needs, or, for us, facilities and access. Then I think we'll be in a better situation. It's very hard to legislate this kind of thing.

Interviewer:

There have been two surveys conducted at the War College. The general concerns are that the media has been out to get the military, and that censorship, by far, is the only answer for the next conflict.

Jennings:

You see I can only really speak as a reporter and as a fairly long-time foreign correspondent who is expected in times of conflict to counsel my more junior colleagues, which I do. I tell them what sort of buzz words and code words they shouldn't use. You don't talk about "indiscriminate bombing" when the Israelis bomb your hotel, because maybe that's exactly what they intended to do. You don't use words like "carpet bombing" comparable to what happened in Dresden, because it may seem like that to you at the time but there is simply no comparison. But speaking as one reporter, the less of an adversary relationship between me and any organization with which I have to work, doesn't make me your patsy in any way, shape or form. And does not mean we're going to get along all the time. And does not mean we are going to see the political aim in the same way, or even necessarily the military aim in the same way, if I'm obliged to report on military affairs. The purely adversarial relationship, it seems to me, is counterproductive. And I would think that most of my colleagues would believe. . . .

Interviewer:

That's one of the things that opened our eyes. We listen to reporters like yourself, George Wilson and Drew Middleton who all talk the same way. You have different aims, different objectives. You all three view the same object in a different manner. You're all in the business of reporting the same thing and you all see it differently. We can accept that you're

all honorable men. There's no one here who's a virulent rightist, leftist or anything else. You tend to seek truth, and that's your business.

Jennings:

I would phrase that slightly differently. It's a more subtle way of phrasing it. I'm one of those who believes there isn't any single truth, that this whole business of searching for the truth, in searching for objectivity, is a sort of shroud in which we have enveloped ourselves for generations. I don't think anything teaches you that more than working in the Middle East, because the truth on the Israeli side of the border and the truth on the Lebanese side of the border are both truths. In fact, they're both perceptions of truth. And they are utterly different. I principally think a reporter's role is not "to tell the truth;" it is to convey what other people believe as the truth.

Interviewer:

It requires judgement on your part to tell the truth.

Jennings:

Exactly. What is objectivity? We are trained to watch for certain things. You become trained over the years to recognize a bare-faced lie. You've studied something of history, something of the culture and something of the subject you're dealing with, but you still get told bare-faced lies. You are trained to recognize that three men looking over the wall with their M16s pointed over the wall do not necessarily represent an offensive action. They may represent a defensive action. Reporting requires an awful lot of caution. I have some colleagues in this business whose greatest lack, in my own personal judgement, is caution. I'm a very cautious reporter. I don't make a lot of headlines because I just time and time again find that the headline of today is the correction of tomorrow.

Interviewer:

People in your business are subject to speculation. That's the Achilles heel of the press.

Jennings:

You know you get it in tiny little ways. Last Thursday night Harvard issued a press release saying that Lech Walesa was going to be the commencement speaker at Harvard this year. And it ran out of Boston. We were doing a bit on Poland that night and John Boylan my producer said, "It just doesn't sound right." So we didn't use it. The next day first his wife and then Lech himself were saying they were not going to Harvard. He said, "I'm afraid of having a one-way visa."

Interviewer:

The reason we asked to come in and talk to you is to give us some of your views on the environment you're sitting in here, and the difficulty you have in finding out what is going on in that circumstance.

Jennings:

Well, I don't think I've been very much help to you.

Interviewer:

You have from another point of view, because you've got some experience that there's no way we can replicate. Do you think that the public was ill-served in England by the policies that the government and the military imposed on the media in the Falklands?

Jennings:

Yes, to some extent.

End Of Interview

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